

S E R M O N S

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS

AND

O C C A S I O N S.

By SIR ADAM GORDON, BART. M. A.

LATE OF CHRIST-CHURCH, OXFORD,

AND

RECTOR OF HINXWORTH, HERTS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.

PHIL. iii. 32.

Nil actum reputans, si quid superesset agendum.

LUCAN.

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DEDICATORY PREFACE

TO

PENNISTON PORTLOCK POWNEY, Esq.

DEAR SIR,

I AM induced to present the following humble performance to *you* from two reasons: First, because I am sensible it is upon a subject you have much at heart; which under the serious suspense which gave rise to this effort must have caused you the most poignant anxiety: and also, from an impulse of private friendship; it being the only opportunity I may ever have of testifying

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fyng a just sense of your obliging and considerate attention to my interest upon a particular occasion, which eventually might have been propitious to my future comforts ; in which case, they must have originated in your native readiness of mind, and activity of conduct, no less than in the most kind and neighbourly good will. But independent of these motives, to whom can I address a discourse of this nature with more propriety, than to one so purely devoted to the family and interests of the illustrious personage, whose escape and safety do most gratefully and sincerely influence the sentiments of the following performance ? What therefore it may want in merit, from any deficiencies in the order or manner of its execution, must be supplied by the value of the principles that dictate the undertaking.

I am very sensible that some apology is likewise necessary for the seeming negligence I fear you will discover in this discourse,

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course; but I assure myself of ample indulgence from your candour, when you are informed that the whole work was fabricated and written fair under a very slow convalescence from two recent and successive bodily complaints; interrupted by the daily and unremitted attention to the improvement of my pupil. And the propriety of delivering the sermon on my first appearance at church (on account of the time that had elapsed since the alarming event) allowed me but a few days for the preparation of it; consequently this hasty test of professional exertion is not sufficiently correct to abide the severity of criticism. But as I had only in view to discharge an irresistible call of duty, and having done the best my slender powers will admit, to satisfy those under my charge of the blessings we have experienced, and the happiness of enjoying a peaceable and prosperous state of government; I retire, with due resignation, to my appointed obscurity, and to the labours of my official and domestic engagements.

With

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With my best wishes for your welfare,
and an uninterrupted success in your laudable pursuits, I remain, with great regard,

Dear Sir,

Your faithful friend,

and obedient

humble servant,

A. GORDON.

Hinxworth,
Aug. 30th, 1786.

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SER-

S E R M O N I.

God's peculiar care of virtuous princes considered.

——— ἀντί νυ πολλῶν
Λαῶν ἔστιν ἀνὴρ οἷε Ζεὺς κῆρι φιλήσῃ.

HOM. II.

Serus in cælum redeas ; diuque
Lætus intersis populo Quirini ;
Neve te nostris vitiis iniquum
Ocior aura

Tollat———
Hic ames dici pater atque princeps.

HOR.



S E R M O N I.

PSALM xx. part of ver. 6.

*Now know I that the Lord saveth his
anointed.*

THE words of the text clearly imply these two points of doctrine; that in some instances a more than ordinary interposition of Providence may be deduced from observing the circumstances of a deliverance—"Now know I;" and that the safety of Kings is peculiarly signified to be the object of God's care—THE LORD SAVETH HIS ANOINTED. I shall have abundant opportunity to evince the truth of both, in the particular application of them to the subject of my present discourse.

I cannot introduce my return to you, my friends, with greater propriety from this place, than by an act of public praise to Almighty God for the late happy instance we

have experienced of his merciful providence in the extraordinary preservation of our most gracious Sovereign: a thanksgiving in which all present I am sure will heartily join me, as such a deliverance must excite the purest exultation in the breast of every loyal subject, of every lover of his country, independent of those private sensations of humanity which the danger of so eminent a personage, and so upright a character, must naturally occasion. Let us then adopt the advice of the prophet, by “ offering sacrifices of a sweet favour unto the God of heaven, and praying for the life of the king and his sons” (Ezra, vi. 10.): and as no offering is more acceptable to our heavenly Father than thanksgiving, for he declareth that “ who so giveth him thanks, he honoureth him;” so none is more easy for us to present, nor can we be excusable if we withhold it.

Christian charity leads us to hope, that the desperate attack upon so valuable a life was the effect of insanity in the object who attempted it, rather than any instigation of evil counsel. A machination so truly diabolical can hardly be supposed to find abettors

tors in a state like ours, and under *such* a reign. In a land where universal liberty of conscience is indulged, it could not originate in the blind and furious zeal of any religious pretender; there is no probable foundation for the surmise; for it has been objected by some, that even too tolerant a spirit prevails: and so celebrated is our constitution by many writers, for its adherence to freedom of every kind, that the very existence of party, in this country, has been supposed to flow from no malignant source, but from patriotic vigilance alone.

Before I proceed to the immediate purport of my discourse, it cannot be improper to advert to the more general benefits and blessings for which we are indebted to the care of Heaven; and which I shall confine at present to three distinct articles.

First then, among the greatest we must surely reckon that of being blessed with a prince, who, born and educated in this country, does intimately comprehend the essence of its constitution, has all the strongest ties to endear him to it, and is endued with wisdom, fortitude, and paternal spirit to protect it.

Secondly, The happy form of our justly admired government is the next object of continual gratitude to the Disposer of all events, who has suffered it gradually to arrive to its present perfection; who has preserved it under severe assaults and shocks; and, like gold, produced it purer by the trial of its intrinsic properties. Attempts have been made at several periods, through false pretensions of public zeal, to correct disorders it has been supposed to have attracted, and the very life of the state has been occasionally endangered by the premature remedies that have been adopted; but hitherto, thank Heaven, it has survived every dangerous experiment of political quackery, and stands secure upon the basis of its triple pillars.

There is that agreement or affinity in the nature and connection of human affairs, which renders the progress and success of particular systems more practicable in some states than others: as far therefore as any change may be accounted for upon worldly principles abstractedly, or is affected by a coincidence of human actions, it may be confidently asserted (from experience of melancholy

lancholy record as to the attempt) that innovation is not a plant adapted to our soil; the natural reason for this seems ingrafted in the origin and growth of the constitution, which every one versed in the regular study of English history may easily resolve.

Under the heavy visitation of Heaven for the crying iniquities of our ancestors, in those times to which I here allude, a temporary revolution was in truth permitted upon principles inimical to the established government of the country : deplorable were the grievances the struggle produced, and marked on the innovating side with every thing unjust, unprecedented, and horrible. But when the Almighty in mercy suspended his vengeance, that unnatural system came to nought, nor could subsist under the united support of prevailing party, uncommon genius, dauntless fortitude, and a whole train of arts and engines that were employed to prolong its reign : not power and violence together, neither of which were left untried, could aught avail. Nay the very character, whose profound hypocrisy, treachery, and craft, had been so prosperously employed in effecting the ruinous change, and lending

it apparent permanency, when left to the dictates of his own ambitious will, and no longer instrumental as a scourge in the decrees of Providence, is known to have inclined *himself* to a quite contrary species of authority from what he had pretended to prefer, and had rendered that very system accessory to the most despotic sway, which loudly, but falsely, boasts the reputation of quite contrary principles: and, if the Divine goodness had not confounded his designs, he would have settled himself in possession of a dignity which he had exhausted every will to degrade and annihilate; in the usurped authority of an office, the just execution of which constitutes the beauty and perfection of government, no less than it tends to the happiness of the subject. So inconsistent, so destructive are the pursuits of inordinate ambition, and the counsels of wicked men; so abortive were the ultimate aims of that artful, designing, and enterprising phenomenon of lawless usurpation; to such a pitch of danger had the blindness and infatuation of the people contributed to reduce them!

It is far from my inclination to enter
upon

upon any subject of political enquiry; a very different design engages my exertions now: and lest this digression should be thought too long, I would humbly submit whether a short retrospect to these disastrous times may not help to raise a proper sense of our present happy establishment, by reminding us of the storms that have gone over us, and thereby exalt the fervour of our grateful oblations for the various and undeserved mercies we have received from Providence. Under this idea alone I was induced to give you a faint outline of former calamities; and hence I think it may fairly be concluded, that if ever it should please Almighty God to suffer us to be swallowed up by some extensive and superior power, in punishment for our manifold sins, we may venture to pronounce the fatal visitation nigh, whenever we shall be so unfortunate as to see the component parts of our excellent constitution disunited, and that we degenerate into any *other* form of government than the present.

Infinite are the ways by which Omnipotence can effect his holy purposes; but without presumption it may be affirmed, that

that such a revolution would be the alarming instrument of our downfall.

The third particular of providential favour that demands our united gratitude, is the quiet and flourishing condition of our country under an able and propitious administration. And here every member of the community has a trial of duty imposed, that requires the strictest integrity of principle to mark his conduct, or he is unworthy the protection of the state he lives in, or to partake the benefits which are derived from the wise determinations of those in power. Contributions *must* be levied, in whatever hands the reins of government are entrusted; they are positively unavoidable; and it is certainly a mistaken zeal to indulge such cavilling at the *mode*, as may disturb the valuable purpose of the *end*. Exceptions of this nature would be infinite, was every plausible, ingenious objection attended to, that might occasionally proceed from a covetous, an envious, or a partial principle: repeals and emendations would encroach upon the time required for other business; and the best exertions for the common good in consequence impeded and rendered

rendered fruitless. In short, no set of men whatever but must be puzzled and discouraged by such proceedings.

If an exhausted treasury is to be replenished; if the public credit is to be restored; it is of small concern what articles mark the means of furnishing resources, so they are productive; for it is incontrovertible, spite of all the delusive and perplexing tricks of sophistry, that the burthen is ultimately divided amongst the public, and the subscription will be always just and equal in proportion to the conscientious compliance of individuals: and all those who remain dead to the positive duties they owe to the state, in common with their fellow-subjects, will doubtless become accessory in retarding the endeavours of government, let the taxes be what they will, more or less popular in their description.

No denomination of subjects will think themselves particularly aggrieved, or desire to be excepted, if they would view the matter in the following light; for what can actuate the measures of any rulers, but to effect the general good? and whatever apparent exceptions may be advanced, as it is
idle

idle to suppose any partial determination can be *purposely* contrived, the most candid construction should be passed upon all *general* acts of power.

Every wise and upright member of the community, unprejudiced by favourite maxims and private ends, will consider the state under which he lives, and is protected, in some respect as the patrimony of a large family, which is variously employed, when in a flourishing condition, for the general benefit of the proprietors; but which, if it should happen to suffer injury by unpropitious events, is no longer able to afford the usual indulgences, and therefore will require the aid of salutary expedients to put it in a train of recovering its former vigour. In effecting this, it is very manifest the proprietors cannot expect to live in every respect as sumptuously as before these unforeseen misfortunes happened. These exigencies necessarily suggest œconomy, to render the unavoidable contribution more tolerable; nor can there be reason for just complaint, when this remedy tends to re-instate them in all their several proportionate degrees of comfort; and so far it cannot

not be denied, but that the prevention of the grievance in some degree depends upon *themselves*. And so far the analogy may be applied, to stop the clamour of the higher ranks; who, by the way, have less essential reason to complain.

If the case should be extended to a different class of men; to those who earn their living by trafficking in the various articles of consumption; *they* have also a remedy in themselves, to obviate any possibility of *oppression*, and which shifts the burthen distributively upon society at large: the particular modes they will employ are too evident to need a mention, and perhaps might be exceptionable in a discourse of this complexion. Even the *poorest* orders have yet the same prevention in *their* power likewise, by exercising a proportionable and necessary œconomy, which however is not likely, from the nature of things, to be so general as to defeat the sufficiency of the supplies: and, after all, we must subscribe invariably to the truth of the common observation, that desperate disorders must have desperate applications; and whatever objections are still ready to be started, it is but fair to resolve

solve them into that share of imperfection which attends all sublunary schemes and projects, which at best receive their chief commendation from the purity of the *design*, as the event is subject to various uncertainties and disappointments.

Still, however wholesome the remedy, it is undeniably irksome to many; for it requires the utmost resolution, and some wisdom, to effect the recovery even of a private fortune, and to adopt the mortifying habits of *sudden* and *rigid* œconomy: and as it is in the nature of most men who live by their own labour and industry, to wish to get all they can, and to be unwilling to spare any thing from their profits, but just as affects their private gratifications; so the multitude, not attending to the necessity of the exertion required on *their* part, ever have been and ever will be clamorous upon new levies; never considering how fatally the disorder might proceed, if timely cure was not prescribed, and how much more seriously the property of every person would be affected in consequence of a relaxation to restore the sinews of government: whereas, if each private subject would but exercise
the

the plainest judgment, and consider the relation in which he stands to the vast body of the people of which he is a member, he would soon be convinced of what is the actual fact, that, by subscribing his honest portion to the exigencies of his country, he is only acting the prudent part; he is doing no more than what is incumbent upon every relation of a family, really interested in its credit and prosperity.

Further, it is certainly matter of great consolation, in contemplating the case under this idea, that the characters employed in the work of recovering the efficiency and splendour of this declining estate, are no ways deficient, but very exemplary as to genius, talents, integrity, judgment, fortitude, and perseverance in the respective offices engaged in this good purpose, and in a mutual zeal to complete the work. I am here becomingly restrained from any *personal* application, through PECULIAR DELICACY OF SITUATION. But, alas! so deplorable is the degeneracy of the age, that if, to many of these qualities, I venture to add the respectful tribute due to purity of manners, confirmed by early and uniform practice,

practice, disinterestedness, or any unfashionable virtue, it is to be feared the bare mention of what should constitute the brightest ornament of our nature, and what must especially dignify an exalted station, will be apt to incur the illiberal reproach of licentious ridicule, if not furnish subject of profane exception.

I am prompted to offer these considerations from the pure wish alone of raising your religious praise for every blessing, and to point out your duty as good and quiet subjects.

But, amidst this just detail of public benefits, the serious grief that lately threatened us, the melancholy relation of domestic woe, calls for due attention, though happily transient. Far short of its real state will be the description of so sad a scene; for never yet could language paint the oppressive grief, the disconsolate suggestions, the silent agonies of a wife's distress, or mother's sorrow. None possibly can *conceive* them, but those whose pure engagements, and endearing pledges, enable them to judge of similar misfortune. The sympathising witness of the stricken sufferer may form

form some slender notion of them ; but they *alone* whom sad experience has visited with the bitter portion, can fully estimate such complicated misery. In such an assembly *some* must have deeply felt this truth.

If a slight view of private trouble can furnish us with an affecting picture ; if, in the intricate list of the afflictions to which the happiest state is subject, we find nothing more productive of just regret, and heavy lamentation, than the removal of a *parent* from us ; what an accession of despondency must have marked the lot of the royal sufferers, from the important consideration of their rank, and the serious nature of the calamity, had such an irreparable loss befallen them ! The suitable provision, and future happy alliances, of a numerous and beauteous offspring, are interests of such magnitude, that nothing but the qualified judgment and anxious affection of a father could safely manage. But if we fail in power to give these near concerns their due effect, how shall we express the feelings which irresistibly invade us, on contemplating the highly respected object of this

insupportable suspense—of that weight of sorrow, which but for God's gracious care had been the afflictive portion of her, whose long and unremitted testimony of the most benevolent attachment to her people has so firmly rivetted proportionable admiration and regard in all our hearts! The undertaking is too deeply interesting: and in the room of such a painful effort, let sorrow give way to joy; let us avail ourselves of the sudden and happy transition of surprise her Majesty experienced in the Royal safety; let us unite in grateful boast, that no throne in Europe can vie with ours, in such a joint assemblage of amiable and useful virtues.

Having now fully acquitted myself in stating such interesting and leading particulars, as I trust are aptly introductory to the general intention of this discourse, I proceed to enlarge upon the text.

Daily experience too powerfully evinces, that it is an unfavourable characteristic of man's inconsiderateness and ingratitude, that he is often totally insensible to the riches of the blessings he enjoys, till roused by their sudden loss into a thorough sense of the benefits he once possessed.

The irresistible reflection that offers itself to our minds, upon a supposition that the late most unlooked-for attempt on the precious life of our gracious Sovereign had been attended with fatal effects, illustrates the above censure.

To us, whose belief in the Deity is not only founded in the evidence of rational observation, but confirmed by scriptural testimony, there needs no arguments at this time to establish a faith in the superintending influence of the Supreme Being. It must be obvious to the assent of every unprejudiced mind, that the God who made the world still preserves and governs it; and that nothing happens in it, but what is subject to his controul, we have powerful conviction by the word of his own Spirit, as declared by the second person in the ever adorable Trinity, our blessed Redeemer himself, when, in the strongest figure that can confirm the *universality* and *minuteness* of this inspection, it is affirmed, that not a sparrow falls without Divine concurrence: from which instruction a sure conclusion may be drawn, that Infinite Wisdom is not regardless of the fate of empires; but that

their well-being interests his direction. Indeed the doubt is solved by the immediate question of our Lord in the argument with his ignorant and faithless disciples—
 “ Are ye not of more worth than many sparrows ?” If the hearts of kings are in his rule and governance, doubtless their persons are proportionably instrumental to his holy purposes, and demand his care and interposition for their safety.

But further, if we have cause to believe that the protection of good men in general engages the regard of the Universal Parent, we may justly argue, that the persons of upright kings are *peculiarly* his care ; as being raised by his unerring will to posts of more importance in their charge, than what falls to the lot of the common rank of his creatures. Of this we have abundant proof in holy writ : it will be sufficient to select a few passages to the purpose.—“ Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” is an injunction to be found in the first book of Chronicles, chap. xvi. ver. 22 ; and refers particularly to those upon whom the Almighty professes to bestow an extraordinary degree of favour and attention. This is
 shewn

shewn more particularly in the persons of David, Solomon, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, at all times when their deportment received the sanction of divine approbation, and in the most singular and miraculous instances, as their respective histories largely shew. And still further to corroborate, that the sacred office of the Sovereign was frequently the professed object of divine regard, we see it extended to the persons of several heathen monarchs who acted up to the light they had received, and, by their humble assent to the partial evidences the Almighty was occasionally pleased to grant them, became instrumental by their virtues to the furtherance of his merciful designs: among these we have a pointed instance in the character of Cyrus king of Persia.

That good princes should experience the reward of heavenly protection is perfectly consonant with our notion of the Divine attributes, and corresponds with these frequent declarations of the fact: "For mercy and truth uphold the king and his throne." "He sheweth mercy unto his anointed by GREAT DELIVERANCE, and to David and his seed for evermore."

But I will endeavour to establish the doctrine of my text by a still closer examination of the case before us; that we may better estimate the value of the deliverance, and be moved to ascribe becoming praise; that we may fully evince our belief of the position, "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed."

Whether, then, the unhappy person whose attempt was thus providentially frustrated, embarked in the horrid purpose from an impulse of frenzy, which has proved to be the case, or (which I have shewn most unlikely) was so far deserted by God as to present a fit object for so vile an act, in the flagitious counsels of some undiscovered plot; it is most certain, that in *either* case the danger to which our Sovereign was exposed is no ways lessened: the immediate intent was murderous, and a blow effected under *either* influence might have proved fatal, and involved as equally in inexpressible misfortunes.

We must attribute the happy escape, then, to the watchful arm of the Lord, by averting the direction of the blow; by permitting a saving presence of mind to take place;

place ; in short, by over-ruling the power of the evil spirit.

It is also manifest, from enquiry into the further particulars of the event, “ that no “ king is saved by the multitude of an host : ” the truth of which text is here clearly proved, by the merciful intervention of a saving Providence ; for it does not appear that the offender met with any interruption in her approach to the attack : and though it may not be improper to suggest upon this remark, that however indisputable the doctrine of the text, and that nought can divert the decrees of Omniscience ; yet it no ways derogates from a proper trust in God, to employ all the becoming means of human safeguard ; which, besides the authority which reason lends it, is recommended by the long established custom of princes of all ages, and is most forcibly enjoined in the second book of Kings, chap. ii. ver. 8. in these words :—
 “ And thou shalt compass the king round
 “ about, every man with his weapons in
 “ his hand ; and he that cometh within
 “ the ranks let him be slain ; and be ye
 “ with the king at his going out and at his
 “ coming in.” A stronger proof cannot be

advanced of the human respect required by God unto the sacred office. But this quotation supplies us with a pleasing opportunity of accounting for the custom of dispensing with extraordinary parade in the attendance upon our Royal Master: the most endearing cause presents itself that perhaps the human mind is capable of conceiving, and cannot fail of binding every grateful subject more nearly in affection to his person. It is a test of *paternal confidence*, the most amiable and enlarged that can be instanced; and flatters the general sentiments of the people, no less than it dignifies the nature of their ruler: a practice that, I apprehend, will find a precedent but in few other countries. Yet, as before observed, from the marvellous escape we are now met to celebrate, it points out the expedient of future caution, and the employment of due and justifiable security.

In honour of God's promises, the truth of which might be defended by a thousand texts, it is an unexceptionable conclusion to infer, that an early love of virtue, an unsullied attachment to her dictates in all her ways, and an invariable perseverance in the

most important duties of life, will insure blessings from heaven, will invite a more than ordinary protection; and, if time allowed, sufficient proof of a more private nature might be adduced to assert the preventing favour of Heaven in preserving the life of our King from fatal accident. Traits of the more pleasing and domestic qualities are seldom conspicuous in potentates, from the very nature of their situation; their elevated rank seems inimical to their culture; and indeed so hazardous to any virtuous progress, that their best designs are frequently controuled by obstacles inseparable from their office: but where they do prevail, notwithstanding these restraints, they must be allowed to increase in value from the rarity of the example, and hold out the noblest models of imitation. To illustrate this remark, I shall close what I have to say upon the subject with one more circumstance that demands our highest admiration. It is the matchless deportment of the Sovereign upon this sudden and exasperating attack.

It is no easy attempt deservedly to celebrate the excellence of temper with which
this

this cruel insult was received. The undaunted composure, the Christian forbearance, the compassionate commands, on one hand; and also the extreme caution and mercy of the legislature on the other, baffle all my powers which to extol most.

If we turn our eyes to the spirit and practice of neighbouring nations, what an odious extreme is discernible in the comparison! The bare suspicion of a design upon the life of the monarch would expose the party to the question; that is, an enquiry, exacted by insupportable torture, into the cause of the crime, the accomplices, and every thing relative to the interests of the state. Should the wretched object be instigated to the perpetration of the shocking purpose by the dictates of a distempered brain, as in the case before us; only imagine the additional misery to natural misfortune, to have a *false* confession extorted by means of *pain*. Can any one but shudder at the idea of madness exasperated by torment, and imaginary guilt extorted by such inhuman engines? Do but reflect upon the horrors of a foreign prison only; so replete with barbarous vanity, that the pen of the humane

man historian has been employed in registering the melancholy picture: and as the most pleasing transition, because substantial, let us revert with grateful praise unto the very different establishment of this happy country, WHERE HUMANITY AND JUSTICE GO HAND IN HAND, WHERE THE SOVEREIGN IS TRULY A FATHER TO HIS PEOPLE.

To conclude: Let this singular mercy with which we have been lately visited, and the hourly private and unmerited bounties we receive from a gracious and long-suffering Lord, strike home upon our hearts, and animate them with a sense of the profoundest gratitude: for if love does not awaken duty in us, nothing will. Let the recollection of God's great mercy, and our own foul unworthiness, operate to the amendment of our ways; then shall we prevail upon him to continue his blessings to us.

By this present humble act of praise we have paid one joint tribute of gratulation, with the rest of our fellow-subjects throughout the realm, for the marvellous preservation of his Majesty's life: let us add our hearty prayers that he may be blessed with
a long

a long and happy reign, and health to govern these kingdoms in prosperity and glory; and this we may confidently hope for, unless our increasing wickedness should avert the blessing.

Finally, from the repeated instances of a saving Providence waiting upon the person of our Sovereign, and from his pious and grateful returns to Almighty God for the same, we may justly adopt the words of the Psalmist (Psalm xxi. 1. 7.), and exclaim :
 “ The king shall joy in thy strength, O
 “ Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly
 “ shall he rejoice ! For the king trusteth in
 “ the Lord.”

Now to God the Father, &c.

28 SE60

S E R-

S E R M O N II.
O N C O N F I R M A T I O N.
P A R T I.

Vides externa nostra et ritualia eò spectare, ut officii
quemque sui commonefaciant, animisque inspirent sanctita-
tem: propositum finemque summum legis Christianæ.

BURNET de Fid. et Off.

THE
MUSEUM
OF
COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY



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S E R M O N I I.

A C T S, xv. 41.

And he went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches.

NOTHING can be more improper, or absurd, than to engage in any undertaking, especially one of a religious nature, without some knowledge of what we are doing; unless this is obtained, no useful consequence can be expected barely from any outward action on our part: one might just as reasonably hope to receive benefit from advice delivered in a tongue we do not understand, merely from having the sound enter in at our ears. To remedy this mistake, I have already employed some means to prepare and fit those who are wisely and properly disposed to profit by the approaching opportunity of being confirmed

firmed in the religion they pretend to profess.

After the public notice ordered to be given of the Lord Bishop's good intentions towards this part of his diocese, in common with others, I have preached to you twice upon the subject; employing the studies and exhortations of the most learned and pious of our church prelates, to give you clear notions of what you are going to undertake.

You have had a very sufficient time to make yourselves perfect in that part of the qualification positively required by the canons of the church, I mean the knowledge of your Catechism; you have had a plain explanation of the nature and end of the institution put into your hands, to help you still more; you have been examined in *both*, and exhorted to apply to God for his blessing upon your good endeavours to become obedient to him, both in submitting to the holy ordinances he hath appointed, and in the conduct of your future lives, now that you are about to take your Christian vows upon yourselves; you have also had an humble prayer suitable to the occasion provided

provided for you, and earnestly recommended to your constant use. I trust I have thus far discharged my bounden duty towards you upon this occasion; it has at least been done as effectually as particular cases would allow. If there is still any want of knowledge, it must lay at your own door; it must proceed either from inattention, or want of inclination to be improved; for I have declared myself always ready to satisfy the enquiries of any that will apply to me for information. As the time is now at hand for fulfilling this task of duty, it only remains with me to take this opportunity of discoursing to you once more on the subject of the ordinance; that nothing may be left undone to the best of my humble abilities for your service.

Common sense must point out to you the propriety and advantage of being able to "give an account of the hope that is in us;" what therefore I shall add on the subject this day, will be with a view both of refreshing your memory with the main end of the ceremony of confirmation, and to strengthen and improve the sense you have, or might have, possessed of it already.

In order to render what I shall say to you more easy of apprehension, I shall divide it into three distinct heads, and speak to you plainly upon each of them.

First, I shall prove the authority of the ordinance, and offer a word of friendly admonition to such as may be indifferent about the use of it.

Secondly, I shall shew you what confirmation is, from the sense of former times, its immediate design, and the benefits that may be justly expected from it. And,

Thirdly, I shall exhort you, by way of practical application, to follow the precepts of that faith you therein openly profess to hold, and to be absolutely necessary for the sanctifying of your lives and conversation.

1. There can be no stronger authority for the use of this holy ordinance than the example of the inspired apostles. Nothing can better prove it to be their practice than the plain language of scripture. We read in the text, that Saint Paul "went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches." The office of bishop is of apostolic institution; the original word made use of to express it, signifies inspector, or overseer; and

and our superior rulers of the church, who are strictly their successors, do, in discharge of their office of visitation (among other articles of useful and important concern), administer this ceremony occasionally, as seemeth best to their wisdom, and the good of the people committed to their charge.

In defence of the sign used in this ordinance, we read also in the 8th of the Acts, and 18th verse, *that by laying on of hands of the apostles there was conveyed the gift of the Holy Ghost*; and in the foregoing verse it is said, “then laid they “their hands upon them,” doubtless, to confirm them in the faith they had just professed, as the words of the verse declare. It is necessary however in this place to inform you, that no such power is presumed upon by our bishops; these extraordinary gifts having long ceased out of the church, as being needless now they have done the work of confirming the truth of the Christian religion, the belief of which forms one article of our present faith.

The Almighty prepares his servants *now* for the ordinary influences of his grace, by the use of such means as he has appointed.

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The form therefore is only preserved, as having been the common custom of blessing, and shewing good-will towards particular persons; and was used in most ancient times, especially on religious occasions. This is very clear from the early usage of the first fathers: when Israel conveyed his blessing to the sons of Joseph, it is said “ he “ guided his hands wittingly laying his “ right-hand upon Ephraim’s head, and “ his left on Manasseh’s head,” Gen. xlviii. 14. In Deuteronomy, chap. xxxiv. ver. 9, “ Joshua received the spirit of wisdom “ from Moses, who laid his hands upon “ him.” The proofs from the Old Testament and ancient history are full to the point. In Matthew, chap. xix. ver. 13, the custom is particularly recommended by the example of our blessed Lord himself, where *young children are brought that he should put his hands upon them*; and, among the very many instances of the apostles using it, when they bestowed their gifts and blessing, we have the words of Saint Paul, 2 Timothy, chap. i. ver. 6: “ Wherefore “ I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir “ up the gift of God which is in thee, by “ the

“ the putting on or imposition of my
 “ hands.” So much for the *manner* of the
 form. It may not be unprofitable now to
 say something to you upon the necessity of
 forms in general.

There are among us many well-meaning
 people, who nevertheless are so unfortunate
 as to labour under considerable prejudices
 and mistakes in this particular. They are
 either misled by the force of their own
 fancy; or, which is often the case, they
 are blinded and deceived by the artful per-
 suasion of others. They are loud for *in-*
ward experience, but cry down all outward
 form and order. Now, as it is an incum-
 bent duty in my profession to establish the
 “ unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,”
 I would charitably offer my best endeavours
 to remove these errors; and what I shall
 beg leave to recommend to their considera-
 tion, if any, favouring such opinions, should
 happen to be present, is this, that they
 would not be hurried away with *every wind*
of vain doctrine, but to *try the spirit*, whe-
 ther it is of love, or of discord and strife;
 that they would *search the scriptures*, and
 abide by them impartially. All scripture is

written for our learning; and if we allow one part to be of Divine inspiration, we must subscribe to the whole, as equally binding on such a supposition: for the use therefore of those I am particularly addressing at this time, I shall draw my arguments from scripture only.

The description of people I allude to are very properly attached, in a fond degree, to every thing delivered by our blessed Lord himself; plain sense must oblige them then to abide by every thing *implied* in his words, as well as what he more positively *declared*. They are also wonderfully partial to the writings of the apostles: we desire no stronger proof than their universal authority for the use of forms, and the establishment of order. And as nothing can be fairer than to attack an adversary with his own weapons, I shall submit the following testimonies of Jesus and his apostles to the serious consideration of those who boast of being his disciples. I would only ask, what can come closer to a command, in respect to the use of *forms*, than these very words of Jesus Christ. Upon being forbidden by John to submit to the ceremony of baptism

baptism (in the first place as supposing he needed it not, and on account of the unworthiness of the minister, which John's humility and prophetic knowledge of the Divine Person represented to himself), "he answering says, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." To submit to the ordinances God hath appointed, you see, is styled by Christ himself as "fulfilling all righteousness." By this act he supports and sanctifies the office and form of baptism, which he afterwards confirmed by commanding his disciples to baptize all in the name of "the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." And no more satisfaction can be required, by any one not wilfully blind, or deluded through conceit and perverse singularity, than, upon our Saviour's rising out of the water, that the Spirit of God visibly united to qualify the *outward* form of the Baptist's mission. Our blessed Master's positive approbation of the *form* which marks this ordinance of confirmation cannot be disputed, when, respecting himself, it is said, "then laid he his hands on them, and blessed them." Could the apostles follow any clearer authority?

thority? And our church, with that purity and truth with which all her institutions are distinguished, continues to tread in their steps. But in further proof, I will afford you another circumstance, with which perhaps few present are acquainted: for though all teachers of new modes are not only, many of them, above the help of learning, but they who have it are apt ungratefully to disown its benefits, and conceal, from a spirit of false humility, the supports it is calculated to convey to religion; yet doubtless it is to be esteemed among the manifold gifts and blessings of God; or why have some men better capacity than others, or indeed any at all? and therefore where learning is employed not to puff up, but to promote the service of God, assuredly it is an article that *highly exalts his praise*.

To such persons then as have an objection to the use of forms, and prefer the value of extempore composition, I would again submit our Lord's own example in the positive form of his comprehensive prayer, which affords us a sure rule both for matter and manner, and by its shortness is directed against the Pharisaical custom of
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using long prayers, which our Saviour censures in Matthew, chap. vi. ver. 7 : "They think they shall be heard for their much speaking." Now the circumstance I would make known to you is, that the substance of this very prayer of Christ's (which must be allowed a pattern for all praying, "for never man spake as he spoke") was contained, as the learned inform us, in the *written* forms of some of the Jewish services, which it cannot but be supposed that Jesus knew; nay, the firmest conclusion may be inferred, that by making choice of what was so well known, he thereby intended to record his assent to the benefit of a regular form, and made choice of these heads of which his prayer is composed, as a pattern of the *closeness* and *purity* he required from his followers in their religious addresses.

A great deal more in defence of this article might be advanced from the very words of our blessed Redeemer, or the plain designs of them; but time does not permit: I shall only add a short proof that the apostles likewise, with whose writings these very worthy people in many essentials are intimately

intimately acquainted, are both clear and full in their support of *order, ordinances, and subordination* of the ministry.

It is among the lamentable instances of human weakness, that people will reconcile themselves to the greatest inconsistencies, when a favourite tenet or system is at stake; and what can more fully declare the truth of this assertion, than when we see men flying in the face of establishments founded on the plainest religious precedents, and sheltering themselves under scriptural authority at the same time, for private singularities, and daily novelties? By this means they confound and involve themselves in the greatest difficulties. Let us see then what the tongue of scripture declares upon these subjects. In 1 Timothy, chap. iii. ver. 1, it is asserted, "if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Had all the ministry been of one order, or the above office not then in being, or had it not been both useful and honourable, the apostle would not have spoken thus. Nay, the *first* of this order is Christ himself, who in the 1st of Peter, chap. ii. ver. 25, is styled the "Bishop of our souls."

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Will any be hardy enough to deny the truth of these vouchers? In the 20th of the Acts, and 28th verse, Saint Paul thus speaketh to this order of men: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and unto the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." In the 30th verse he also prophetically warns us of what has been often seen since, and daily happens: "Also of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Here is an undeniable argument in these very words, that the episcopal was the *first* establishment, and that there would be dissenters from it, from the spirit of perverseness and love of novelty. As to the orders of the ministry, in the 5th of the Hebrews, 6th and 10th verses, and many other parts, we see that upon the change of the priesthood from the Jewish form, "which was no longer to be called after the order of Aaron," Christ himself is named after the particular description of Melchisedec; a circumstance that raises the dignity of the office, and overthrows every countenance to the value of a promiscuous election of *any* man for a minister of the word.

word. That the care of religious affairs was committed to one power of superior authority in different places, is evident from 1 Titus, and 5th verse, when Saint Paul left him “to set in order the things wanting;” and from his own conduct, Acts, chap. xviii. ver. 23, when he “went over the cities of Phrygia in order;” and in the 1st of Corinthians, chap. xi. and ver. 34, “the rest,” says he, “will I set in order when I come.” A host of evidence might be produced to this particular point. Respecting ordinances, *i. e.* laws, decrees, rites, and institutions in the worship of God, I shall confine myself still to the Epistles. In Rom. chap. xiii. ver. 2, Saint Paul says, “he who resists the power, resists the ordinance of God.” In the 1st of Peter, chap. ii. ver. 13, we are commanded to “submit ourselves to every ordinance of man:” certainly then it is our duty to submit to wholesome religious institutions. The penalty, you know, threatened for disobedience by Saint Paul, in Romans, chap. xiii. ver. 2, is conveyed in these very strong words: “He who resists shall receive damnation:” and to preserve

serve union and peace, and prevent confusion and strife, the Apostle, 1 Cor. chap. xiv. ver. 40, expressly commands “that all things be done decently and in order;” which they cannot possibly be, if every one is “to walk as seemeth good in his own eyes” respecting articles of such weighty concern. Lastly, the subordination in the ministry, which is declared in so many parts of all the apostles writings, fixeth, past all dispute, the necessity, usefulness, and beauty of a separated order of men who are to engage in no other thing, and a regular qualified ordination of them. In Philemon, chap. i. ver. 1, Saint Paul distinguishes in his address the *bishops*, and *deacons*, and *saints*: the latter may be supposed the religious part of the people over whom they ruled; and the business peculiar to the different offices of bishops, priests, and deacons, is clearly shewn in the Acts, chap. vi. ver. 2: “It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” And further, in ver. 4: “But we (meaning the order of priests, or preachers, or elders) will give ourselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word.”

“word.” And when it is said, Rev. chap. i. ver. 6, and chap. xx. ver. 6, “that he hath made us kings and priests of God,”—“and they shall be priests of God and Christ,” it is manifestly spoken by way of that high reward of the faithful after they are departed hence, and cannot belong to any office of public ministry on earth.

And now if you ask, why I have taken all this pains to prove what no sensible, reasonable, or well-informed person can deny; I will tell you honestly, because I fear there are some of you who are out of the habit of considering these things seriously and properly, and therefore rather discourage order and ordinances, than contribute to the one, and seek humbly for benefit from the other; and as I see things in a different light, and am placed by the appointment of God in a very important and public station among you, it is a duty incumbent upon me to point out any error, and exhort against it; and having the most unfeigned love for all your souls, I would wash my hands of a suspicion of winking at any conduct that I think wrong, and
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therefore cannot approve. But do not suppose, my fellow Christians, that I would willingly wound the spirit of any faithful and humble follower of Jesus Christ ; God forbid that I should offend *any of those little ones* in their own estimation, who devoutly aim at that truly Christian temper. No, my dear brethren, be as honest, be as pious as you can ; lean on your Saviour for both the cause and effect (as doubtless he, and he only, is both) : he has done all for us, and by his spirit must do all in us. I would only caution you against doing wrong ; I would only exhort you to uniformity, to *consistency* in your religious progress : be not amongst those, therefore, who despise what the good providence of God has certainly established. “Fools only,” says Solomon, “despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. i. ver. 7), who lower the value of order and government : “Now all power is of God ;” *therefore he that despiseth, despiseth not men, but God.*

I come now to the second head of my division of the subject before us ; and should proceed to shew you what confirmation is : but as I perceive many are not present, for
whose

whose use chiefly I intended this discourse, I shall defer the remainder of it till we meet in the afternoon, when those who may be prevented from attending divine service till that season will have an opportunity of receiving some further information upon the duty which they are preparing to discharge so soon.—May God give his blessing to the humble endeavours that have been made at this time for the benefit of those who are now present, and this through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

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S E R.

S E R M O N I I I .
O N C O N F I R M A T I O N .
P A R T I I .

Regulæ quas præscripserunt Apostoli in exercendis donis divinis, pari ratione locum habent in ritibus instituendis: πάντα πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν γένοιθω inquit S. *Paulus*. Deinde subjecit, πάντα ἐν ὀφειλῇ καὶ κατὰ τάξιν γένοιθω.

BURNET *de Fid. et Off.*

Non id agimus, ut cujufvis Ecclesiæ, quæ Christiani nominis titulum gerit, cultum ritufve propugnemus: sed quæ a Christo, et ipsius Apostolis instituta sunt, ea præstamus innocua—pia—et vere sancta. *Id.*



S E R M O N III.

A C T S xv. 41.

*And he went through Syria and Cilicia
confirming the churches.*

I Concluded my discourse this morning upon these words, at the second division of the subject, reserving what I have further to say upon it to the present opportunity. I preferred this mode, that I might avoid repetition, leave time for you to digest the introductory part, and afford some suitable instruction for that portion of the candidates for confirmation, who perhaps were unavoidably prevented from being present at morning service. I shall now proceed immediately to point out the benefits which may be reasonably expected from this ordinance, by those who are seriously disposed to receive it.

Confirmation is termed by the ancient fathers of the church, an accomplishment, or perfecting of baptism, being in their judgment a necessary part of it. The ground of *their* using it was upon a supposition that baptism only *prepares* the person for the reception of the graces of the spirit, which were *actually* conferred at the time of confirmation ; and in that age when the spirit made visible appearances in the persons confirmed, in order to induce others to enter into the Christian faith, it *might* be so. It is allowed generally to be a blessing ordinarily bestowed by the bishop. St. Cyprian, and most of the fathers, speak of it as having been confined to *them alone*, by virtue of their succession to the apostles, to whom it belonged ; and many of the first Christians esteem both baptism and confirmation absolutely necessary to salvation, and I think we cannot follow better judges. Yet, as to its effects, there is certainly a difference now from what it produced at its first institution, it being (as before observed) peculiar to the days of the apostles, for the immediate effect of the Holy Ghost to be visible at the time of the imposition
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of hands. Miracles have ceased; it is preserved by us therefore as an useful and public declaration, that the person confirmed acknowledges himself a disciple of Christ, and allows the necessity of fulfilling the engagement made for him at his baptism, in order to obtain the benefit of God's ordinary grace in future.

The advantages therefore cannot reasonably be disputed, because it is a solemn renewal of that covenant, or engagement, in which unless we continue to our lives' end, we cannot be saved: it is useful further, in that it reminds the party of the *nature* of that covenant; *i. e.* in what it consists, which very many perhaps, from their earliest infancy to the time of their confirmation, had considered but very carelessly, if at all. Here then, at a time when the powers of the mind are gaining strength, and that persons are better able to *understand* what they had only learnt by *rote*, they are called upon to study closely the principal articles of their faith: a sufficient time of preparation is allowed for that purpose; they have the additional opportunity of a stricter examination from their pastors,

which necessarily quickens them to make an useful progress; and the example of numbers of their own age promotes likewise a Christian spirit of duty. Lastly, the prayers of a large congregation of clergy and laity, uniting with the fatherly benediction of the rulers of the church, contribute to help the good work they are engaged in.

We do not pretend to place more to this ceremony than to any other ordinary means of grace; but it is very reasonable to suppose, that God will bless it equally with any other, if it is humbly performed: and supposing it had no foundation but the decrees of our own church, surely it is a laudable ordinance, that calls upon us to “give testimony of Christ being confirmed in us,” as the apostle speaks, 1 Cor. ch. i. ver. 6; and in Philipp. chap. i. ver. 7, he terms *all who appear in the defence and confirmation of the gospel to be partakers of his grace.*

What hope can we entertain of receiving the help of God’s spirit, if we are backward to make open confession of our faith, and to enlist in the common cause of the Captain of our salvation? Without any violence therefore

fore to the nature and design of this ordinance, it is very just to receive it in this sense also, as a work of the *spirit of God strengthening faint and weak minds*, who feeling their necessities, are come to *implore faith and obedience to that end*. God is the author of strength (through Christ who hath obtained the grace for us); and the word, sacraments, and ministry, confirm it, as being instruments or helps: thus a man is said with propriety to confirm himself, when he takes heart and courage in a good cause, upon hope and trust in God's favour; and accordingly we are thus exhorted by St. Paul, 1. Cor. chap. xvi. ver. 13: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, and be strong." This I trust is the case of all you who are candidates for confirmation next Wednesday; that your design is pure and holy, and then it must meet notice from above. Be resolved, in the words of the apostle, 1 Cor. chap. vi. ver. 16, *that your oath and promise at confirmation be unto you as the end of all strife*; i. e. that you now no longer entertain doubts or difficulties of your duty, but enter upon the weighty task with the se-

riouſneſs it deſerves. For that purpoſe read attentively the whole ſervice to yourſelves, and likewise the form of your public baptiſm, as by being confirmed you give new aſſurance of the truth and certainty of the things before engaged for in your name ; *viz.* to fulfil, accompliſh, and make them good in your perſonal conduct ; to make it clearly appear, in ſhort, upto men, your Chriſtian faith and reſolution. I repeat and enforce theſe things upon you, in as many points of view as poſſible, that you may return home with a full ſenſe of what you have now heard, and with a laſting bleſſing *after* confirmation : and this leads me to mention another benefit, even the moſt important qualification this ceremony is calculated to procure ; I mean, as it is a preparation for receiving the moſt holy and comfortable ſacrament of the Lord's Supper. If you look to the firſt direction at the end of your catechiſm, in your prayer-books, you will ſee that confirmation is conſidered by the church as neceſſary to this good end : the words are, “ that ſo he “ may be admitted to the holy Commu- “ nion ;” and if this was the only good it promiſed,

promised, it is enough alone to establish and exalt the value and benefit of the ordinance. For now, my young brethren, the glorious privilege is given you of coming to that table, where the most needy guest is the best welcome, provided he comes in a *wedding garment*; that is, with an humble conviction of his great weakness and unworthiness; with a grateful sense of *His* free mercy who so compassionately invites him: resolve therefore not to delay this call to so positive and solemn a duty of your religion; if you would wish to go through the world with as little guilt as possible, wisely use the *means* held out to you for your *safety*. Here you will be in a lively manner reminded, by the outward signs of the sacrament, of what your Saviour has suffered for you; and the same signs represent, by way of comparison, what he has promised to do in you, nay, what he must do, if ever you hope to *escape the pollution that is in the world through sin*: for in the manner as the bread and wine give strength and life to your mortal bodies, so must the faith of the capacity and power Christ has procured

procured for you to amend your nature, become a principle of life within you. It is by faith that all assistance from above is to be obtained; ye must be *grafted in Christ*, or ye cannot bear fruit: *I am the vine*, says he, *ye are the branches*; *without me ye can do nothing*. And this life in Christ is not conveyed by way of *charm*, or from an enthusiastic fancy of *immediate* and *irresistible* help, on receiving the outward signs of this sacrament. “The wind
 “bloweth where it listeth, and ye hear
 “the sound thereof, but know not whence
 “it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so are
 “they who are born of the spirit.” It works by the increase of faith and pure humility, confessing your sins, owning your wants, and believing from the heart that Jesus Christ is able to save to the utmost all that come to him for help: “Come unto
 “me all ye that are heavy laden with the
 “weight of your sins, and I will refresh
 “you—my yoke is easy, and my bur-
 “then is light.” It will not, like Satan’s yoke, gall your conscience here, and press you down for ever when you depart hence. No; the struggle for victory shall reward

you with peace in this world, shall crown you with endless happiness in the next. Surrender yourselves then, my young friends, to God now, in the acceptable time : the sacrifice of youth and health, and the vain intoxicating charms of this fleeting life, are most pleasing to him ; make *him* your friend, and nothing can harm you ; prevent, while in your power, the season of bitter repentance, by timely wisdom : “ Remember “ your Creator in the days of your youth, “ before the evil days come, when you will “ have no pleasure in them ;” and all ye now falsely term so will add to the anguish of your soul. I speak to you from experience ; I exhort you as your truest friend ; I beseech you, as you value your souls, and naturally desire their peace and happiness hereafter, trifle not away the precious time of youth ; secure the love and graces of your Saviour, so often, so tenderly pressed upon you. Every present minute affords a blessed opportunity ; when it is past, it can never be recalled, but adds to that register of good or evil which will fix your doom for endless happiness or misery. As a very powerful means to assure
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the one, and escape the other, this holy institution was provided by our gracious Master to be attended by all his sincere disciples as a common form of *remembering him till his coming again*; by which means they are kept alive to their religious obligations, have their gratitude stirred up, and fresh supplies of strength afforded them, if they ask it as he expects: if they use faithfully what they have, he will give them more, for all religion is of a progressive nature; like other things, it thrives or languishes according to the degree of industrious cultivation afforded it; and if people are not better for obeying their Lord's commands in this respect, the fault is not to be placed to the weakness of the means, or his slackness to hear and help, but in their own infidelity, in the profound deceitfulness of the human heart, which will not yield itself wholly unto God; in not sufficiently owning their abundant wretchedness, the confession of which is in itself the best preparation for communicating; without it, every other, however laborious, however long, will prove in vain. To conclude: As by this time you must have

have some tolerable notion of the ordinance you are to fulfil before the bishop; of the propriety and use of it, and of the necessity of sanctifying yourselves in order that ye may reap the portion of eternal life; I have only to exhort you to persevere in all manner of well-doing, “to watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation.... The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak:” and you have besides that infirmity, a powerful and malicious foe, who is always on the watch to ruin you for ever; so that whilst ye are in the body, you will never be free from trial, let your situation be whatever it will; to the very last gasp of life perhaps (if your senses are entire) you will have need to call upon the Lord for help, to conduct you through the strait gate which leadeth unto life. As matter of some consolation to such as have heartily desired to profit by this opportunity, but have been prevented from want of necessary learning, let them be assured, that God, who knoweth the heart, accepteth the will for the deed; let it not discourage them from striving to become qualified against another time: but for those who
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miss performing their duty through their own carelessness, or the neglect of their parents, in not *compelling* them to what is right, I can afford *them* but little encouragement of pardon, till they see their error, and amend it. It is certainly a great disadvantage many of the lower people labour under, that they cannot read; but in this place that misfortune is greatly lightened by a general offer of *free* instruction to all who are well disposed to accept it: to any who slight the valuable opportunity of being able to examine and prove for themselves the treasures contained in the book of life, very great will be their condemnation. It is a blessing they may not always have, and therefore it is greater wisdom and duty to profit by it while they can. Every one who has an upright and serious turn, and wants this means of improving in religious duty, must sensibly lament it, and it should urge them the more to prevent their children from growing up in the like ignorance. There is nothing people can possibly do for them equal to sober example, and godly instruction; and if they fail in those duties themselves,

selves, and deprive their children likewise of *other* help, such conduct must be pronounced most unnatural, and most wicked. I have nothing further to add, unless it is to recommend a decent and orderly behaviour to you on the approaching occasion; but this I should hope is almost needless, after what has been so fully declared to you upon the nature of the subject, and the good end it is intended to promote. May you all profit by these humble endeavours for your good. To God's favour and protection I commend you; which that all present may find, God of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father, &c.

28 SE60

S E R M O N IV.

Introductory Sermon to a Course of Lectures
upon the Church Catechism.

P A R T I.

*Early and sound principles the best preventive
of innovation and instability in religious
concerns.*

Nullum est ædificium absque fundamento, nec arbor aut
frutex absque radice : neque magis sine his seminibus et prin-
cipiis originariis, ulla nasci potest, aut constare religio.

BURNET.

3 E R M O N I

Institution of the ...
upon the ...

P A R T I

In the ...
of ...
concerns.



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Vol. II

S E R M O N IV.

A C T S, chap. viii. part of ver. 30, 31.

And Philip said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt? And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me?

AS it has pleaſed God's good providence, from a variety of particular events, to render my ſituation far more favourable for the diſcharge of my duty towards you, than it has been formerly, I would, through the Divine aſſiſtance, ſhew my grateful ſenſe of this bleſſing, by future diligent, though humble, endeavours to render it inſtrumental to your benefit, and the promotion of God's glory: I would gladly mark this my actual reſidence amongſt you, by ſome exertion of profeſſional induſtry, that I might become a faithful ſteward and ſervant of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; and at the ſame time diſ-

cover the purest regard to your eternal interests.

Upon full consideration of the most likely means to render this intention serviceable to you, I have been able to fix on nothing that can contribute more powerfully to a solid, rational, and effectual improvement of your hearts, than to endeavour to store your heads with sound knowledge in the principles of the religion you profess; or, in other words, to make you fully acquainted with the design, and doctrines, of that excellent form of public instruction, which our church orders to be taught as the ground-work of our faith and practice, viz. the Church Catechism. It shall be my business, both now and in the afternoon, to discourse to you upon the value of this useful study, as an introduction to a continual course of lectures upon this subject.

In regard to the propriety of my intended undertaking, I shall in its due place afford you abundant testimony thereof, from the opinion of several of the highest characters of our church: and as to the necessity of a clear understanding in all religious matters,

matters, especially the first principles of Christian knowledge; that is not only very fully signified in the words of the text, but the answer which follows confirms the use of this kind of information; which peculiarly belongs to the office of a pastor, and whence it is chiefly expected, or likely to be performed in any useful degree: "And he said, How can I understand, unless some man should guide me?" It is this guidance I shall humbly attempt in an easy and full explanation of the Catechism; by satisfying your utmost enquiries concerning what is absolutely necessary for you to know, and do, to obtain eternal life: and in this work I engage, from a conviction of its great use, and of the necessity, both to you and myself, of attending to the apostle's admonition "of doing good while we have time."

But before I enter upon what more nearly concerns my plan, it will be no ways foreign to the main subject of this discourse, to take notice of a very remarkable particular contained in this passage of scripture, concerning the persons appointed to the work of the ministry. Two things

are very worthy notice in the case of the great man alluded to in the text.

First, That though from a holy disposition he was inclined to search the fountain of all truth for knowledge to direct him, he had been hitherto left to the light of his own understanding to discover the way therein; and that though from situation he was deprived of a fuller interpretation of the prophetic word, yet was he favoured with no extraordinary help, but reserved for the benefit of the more ordinary means of receiving the knowledge of God's gracious designs towards him, and all mankind, in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, The circumstance of his instruction strengthens the positive institution of *ordination*, and greatly confirms the authority of a *regular ministry*: for the person appointed to enter him in the mysteries of his faith, and to satisfy his further religious enquiries, was the *first* of that order that received apostolical licence, ordination, or appointment, after our blessed Lord had ascended up on high, and given all power and authority to his immediate successors for the propagation of the gospel, in an orderly

derly and regular manner. He was of that rank which is retained in our church to this day; founded upon the original institution of Christ and his apostles: he was a deacon, duly called, and sent forth, who is here so eminently employed in the grand work of converting this nobleman to Christianity. The Divine Spirit openly interferes to confer this honour upon his qualified servant Philip; as if it was intended to stamp a perpetual sanction on the order he belonged to; and hand down a becoming respect of positive institution to the sacred office, by this extraordinary dispensation.

But to the more immediate purport of my discourse. It requires no enlarged capacity, and but small share of religious inclination, to be convinced at first sight, that a bare repetition of principles and precepts, however frequently and perfectly rehearsed, will avail little to the advancement of godly knowledge, if the meaning and end of what is thus got by rote is not perfectly understood; nay, even that slight degree of children's learning, if only attended to during one short portion of the

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year,

year, would most likely be quite forgotten before the return of the season : this, in truth, is now happily remedied in many places by the pious and provident institution of the Sunday Schools, and for which reason I revived the primitive custom of our church of a weekly attention to this useful study ; and doubtless, from God's blessing, which we may securely promise upon every upright endeavour, the effect will prove valuable in due time, provided you are diligent to assist my good wishes towards your children, by enforcing your parental or relative authority over them,

Many are most negligently, and as weakly apt to affirm, that their children are afraid to attend this public mode of learning their duty to God, and their fellow-creatures. We well know, that most children are naturally backward in complying with the business of instruction in any shape ; but were we to yield to their thoughtless inclination, universal ignorance must follow. Some children may likewise discover a constitutional modesty and diffidence for public examination ; where this is really of native growth, it is no unfavourable

vourable symptom, and by reasoning and encouragement may be directed to the best of purposes: but, in general, boldness prevails more than bashfulness, in neglected youth, and points out to those who have the weighty charge, the necessity of shewing them the proper distinction; it is a care incumbent upon every parent and relation to teach them never to be ashamed or afraid of doing what is right, and of learning to be wise and good. Several of the poorer among you I rather fear do not sufficiently warn them to be afraid of doing *wrong*: however, by this humble attempt, they will have an opportunity of knowing thoroughly what is both right and wrong; and then the bad consequence will fall, as is most just, on themselves only, if they do not strive to profit by it. This satisfaction I can take to *my* part in the exertion, that, lest precept should be deprived of its most effectual support, I have, and shall invariably hold out to you, the example of my own charge. But a still further inducement to pursue my present design is derived from these additional considerations.

I am

I am persuaded it is in one great measure from remissness in the early care of instilling religious truths into the minds of children, that, first, when they grow up, they reap so little benefit from what they hear from this place; and, secondly, that, in consequence thereof, they are more easily led astray, and estranged from that pure church in which they were bred, and are “tossed to and fro, and carried away by every wind of doctrine, and the sleight of men.” The wise man’s advice of “training up a child in the way he should go,” is very applicable to this point, as well as the corresponding admonition of teaching them “to remember their Creator in the days of their youth:” they will then be gratefully sensible of the blessing of an established worship, and, when they are old, will neither be apt to depart from God’s laws, or forsake his house.

I will beg your patience while I dwell a little upon both these articles.

First, then, I would from my heart that ye should glory in this, that “ye understand me;” and the sure way to effect it, is to provide early and sound instruction:
by

by which means the advantages will be so truly felt, as to better the lives of the rising generation, and even reach down to the practice of future times; and possibly some share of the ignorance and error that is already contracted may be removed and corrected at the same time.

But do not suppose that I mean here to make any uncharitable observations upon the conduct of *others*, or to interfere but where my own immediate responsibility is at stake: "We must study to be quiet, and do our own work." The constant notice of a growing evil calls for due regard to some sure remedy; and though instant reformation may not appear, and cannot be expected, the sooner an attempt is made to check the progress of a disorder, the more hope is there of its being removed or lessened. The "kingdom of God is represented as a grain of mustard-seed:" from small beginnings it proceeds to flourishing vigour; but if it is never cultivated, the weeds of the soil will soon prevail and smother it.

Every man's own conscience must be his rule upon extraordinary occasions. To *some* perhaps, and in particular situations, such

an exertion may seem inexpedient, or fruitless, which to another may diminish in difficulty from the apparent necessity of the task. "We are all labourers together in the same vineyard," though some have an easier portion of work than others. I would willingly lay a good foundation, "Jesus Christ the chief corner stone," and enable you to *build upon it*. Now, as no other foundation can be laid that will endure the severity of every storm, whatever a man raises upon it, "every man's work shall be made manifest: if it abide, he shall receive a reward; if it be burnt, he shall suffer loss, yet he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire;" that is, if a man persists in the labours of his office, and through the perverseness of human nature, and various causes, no immediate return appears, yet his honest zeal shall be repaid; and if his work is lost, as his toil of course must be rendered more arduous from the melancholy observation of his fruitless endeavours, he may be said "to be *saved as by fire*;" by hard trial—by a difficult and discouraging warfare. Further, though it is most true, that whosoever planteth or
watereth,

watereth, it is God only can give the increase, as well to spiritual diligence as to temporal labour; yet we must both plant and water, or we can have no reasonable prospect of reaping fruit, neither in one case or the other. For notwithstanding it is assuming undue privilege to judge another man's servant, "since to his own master he standeth or falleth;" yet it is our wisdom and duty to look to our own business, as we may happen to be particularly circumstanced in various respects; because *every man shall reap his own reward, according to his labour*. After all, there is *no room for boasting*, for we have none of us any thing but what we have received.

Lest any one therefore should apprehend that I am dealing in new matters, or presuming to exalt my own works, by any vain indulgence of favourite fancies, or partial opinions, I would refer you to the prophet's direction upon this article of early instruction, and then defend my practice by the public authority of our own prelates of ancient and modern times, both in their writings and their conduct. "Whom," saith Isaiah, "shall he teach knowledge, and
"whom

“ whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts; for precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little.”
 In few words, it is impossible too early to commence religious instruction, or to convey it in too simple terms.

The few particular incitements to this duty, as recommended by our ecclesiastical superiors, and which, out of a great variety, I shall only deliver to you at present, shall be, first, the opinion of a pious bishop of former times, who, in treating the subject of the lamented remissness of parents and guardians in sending their children and dependents to receive public instruction in *his* day, has these words: ‘ For this neglect will not be so general,’ says he, ‘ when people find you do not only examine those that are sent, whether they can merely say the Catechism, but set yourselves in good earnest to instruct them thoroughly in all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith, and in all the duties which they owe to Almighty God, to their sovereign, to their parents, and to all their relations,
 ‘ as

‘ as well as to one another : for all sensible
 ‘ and well-disposed people will then see that
 ‘ this is the best sort of education that pa-
 ‘ rents can give their children, and that
 ‘ which will do them more good than any
 ‘ thing else that they can do for them.’

Now, my good friends, how do you find your own zeal in this important business to agree with the practice of such wise parents as are here described ? Do you exert yourselves to bring your children regularly to this place for the said valuable purpose of learning what it is to be a Christian ? Do you not often rather incline to a most hurtful indulgence, in yielding to their excuses, instead of employing what leisure you have to prepare them for such an appearance as might render it a delight, as well as a profit to them to attend ? And if you are not qualified to lend them these helps at home, do you avail yourselves of your natural authority over them, to compel them to attend where they may have that advantage supplied ? Where this fault cannot be denied, let me resolve the reason of this gross breach of duty : it is because you are not thoroughly sensible *yourselves* of the
excellence

excellence and *necessity* of the exercise; because you have not had the blessing of the *like* opportunity in your younger years; or you would, from habit and conviction, for your and their best interests sake, be most strenuous, and uniformly diligent, to instruct, encourage, and *see* them attend; I say, *see* them, for few present, even of those arrived at years of maturity (that are of an ingenuous and humble frame of mind) but must own, if they were closely pressed, that they are *themselves* deficient in that essential foundation of religious knowledge, as is needful to the support of a solid edifice; and for want of which they totter and waver, and are at their wits end to digest and reconcile very many points, which occasionally present themselves to their mind upon serious subjects; all which would appear as clear, as that "he who runneth might read," if they had received a good ground of instruction in proper time.

Such persons, for manifest reasons, cannot be called upon, or perhaps at all persuaded to a public examination; and therefore, by serious attention to the plain, progressive, and essential principles here implanted

planted in those they hold most dear, they might even still collect much valuable information to themselves; such as would satisfy them in many important articles; prove the benefit of the undertaking; and convince them of the heavy guilt that will lay at their own door, if they are slack in giving it encouragement by their presence and their power. In short, I fear the sad experience of indifference in too many respecting this article, does not promise that support to the pious bishop's observation, which it merits, and might be wished it should receive.

There is another class also who would reap considerable good from constant attendance at church, and a serious observation of the mode I have adopted for the improvement of the youth of the parish; I mean those young persons who have lately been confirmed, and who may falsely imagine, because by that holy ceremony their public examination is not positively required, that they are sufficiently qualified, without any further schooling on these subjects: but of this mistake they must be self-convicted by the comparison of what they still retain of

former learning, with what they every Sunday hear repeated, and explained, to their relations and acquaintance; many of whom are but a little younger than themselves: and though by their confirmation they have now publicly, and solemnly, taken their baptismal vow upon *themselves*, it must be allowed highly blameable to grow negligent in preserving the nature of it in their minds, or at their early time of life to suppose there is no need to enquire any further what it implies, and obliges them to practise. Without they pursue a wiser measure, they will soon find all they have hitherto learned will be entirely forgotten; and, though they are so near the age of men and women, they will be very children in Christian knowledge.

The method I have adopted, every one must allow, is easy and universally profitable: as the task returns every Sunday, it must necessarily employ some of the attention of the preceding week; the use of which, in fixing scripture truths upon the tender memory, is of undeniable value. It stirs up in young folks a degree of praiseworthy endeavour to excel; a trial of skill,
which

which is guarded from any mixture of evil, by the very nature of the study itself; and a useful share of shame at being outdone in diligence. The number of each sex examined are not so many as to render it tedious to the congregation, or merely matter of slight form to the scholars themselves; and the gradual advancement in the sense of the exposition taught them, according to their ages and capacities, rivets the meaning in their minds, almost past a possibility of being worn out; since the length of time they are under this discipline must render it so very familiar to them: and as the mind unfolds, and gains more strength, the spirit of the words will naturally affect the conscience, and infuse itself into the soul. The constant repetition of the same precepts in different words, and supported by so many texts of scripture, must be some check to the natural inclination to vice, and prepare the heart for the admission and improvement of every virtue: and that not barely as it were upon mechanical principles; for the very vital means of procuring any valuable increase to our best studies, is as positive a part of this instruction as any

other. Hereby likewise the person of slower capacity has time and opportunity to obtain equal benefit with those endowed with readier powers; and they, on the contrary, who through an uncommon quickness are not always so apt to *keep* what they have learned, are in no danger of letting slip what is for their greatest advantage never to forget.

Lastly, The too great number amongst us, who can neither read, nor have ever been taught the leading lessons of their duty to their Maker, will have a regular, plain, and happy means of helping *their* understanding, and need only bring a well-disposed heart, and apply to God for help, in order to remedy the defects of their former ignorance.

It is truly grievous to think how many there are, though far advanced in life, who, if asked merely for an answer to the plainest question in the Catechism, are quite at a loss to render any rational reply. They have hardly sufficient knowledge in these things to distinguish them from heathens; can give no satisfactory account *why* they were created, or *why continued* in being.

If

If you ask who *made* them, they discover ignorance of the very "God in whom they live, and move, and have their being." If the nature and office of a *Redeemer* is proposed to their understanding, they scarce know more than that "Jesus was reputed a carpenter's son." And as to the promise of that blessed Spirit, held out to all who have enlisted under the conditions of the Christian covenant, it may with too much truth be said, they "never knew that there was an Holy Ghost." These are sad wants in a Christian community; but all this in good time, with God's blessing, may be made up to them who feel a desire to know their duty, through the means here laid down for that good purpose.

And as to the children; they who are qualified to instruct their *own*, will not only enjoy the greater pleasure in seeing them improve; but the very task will be extremely serviceable, in refreshing their own memories with principles which cannot be too deeply rooted.

Such as unfortunately are deprived of their parents, or who still *more* unfortunately have such, as cannot, or *will* not,

help them forward in godly courses, having a Sunday school established, will repair much bad consequence from the above misfortune; no excuse can then be made for ignorance; wilful obstinacy and hardened wickedness alone will refuse or neglect so desirable a method of learning; where every thing is provided, free of all cost and trouble: but here, perhaps, with some, parental authority will be necessary to compel attendance. This is a duty of most serious consequence upon you all, and a weight of woful punishment will overtake you if it is neglected. Now the different means I have so fully laid before you are all intended to perfect the good design of recovering and improving in some, and establishing in others, the principles of sound knowledge. I could easily support the truth of the arguments I have employed, by the express opinions of very many learned, pious, and celebrated governors of our church; but I am persuaded you must be satisfied with what I have advanced, and take my word for the certainty of the said authority. The dictates of your own understanding must agree to the necessity and use of this exertion
among

among yourselves. However, as the public testimony of that highly respected character the late archbishop Secker comes close to the point before us, respecting the good effects of storing the infant mind with religious knowledge, and further vindicates the measure I am pursuing, I shall close this first part of my discourse in the words of that amiable and pious prelate.

1. As a recommendation of the very method I take with the children of our own parish, this excellent man observes as follows:

“ Another defect in some places is, that
 “ barely the words of the Catechism are
 “ taught, without any explanation: now
 “ the very plainest expression in it will re-
 “ quire to be changed into others signify-
 “ ing the same thing, but more fully dis-
 “ covering its meaning, else children will
 “ too often learn nothing but the sound;
 “ and unless this danger, which is a very
 “ great one, be guarded against, you will
 “ have spent both their pains and your own
 “ to little purpose. Besides, all sciences
 “ have their terms, which must be ex-
 “ plained to beginners, and some of these

“ in the Catechism are figurative ones,
 “ very prudently used, as they take much
 “ meaning into a little compass, and lead
 “ to the understanding of the same figures
 “ in scripture, but undoubtedly used on
 “ purpose to be explained; without which
 “ they are liable to make no impression,
 “ or a wrong one. And further still, what
 “ is so short as to be easily learnt by heart,
 “ must have need, were it ever so clear, to
 “ be enlarged upon; the proofs of its truth,
 “ the connection and end of its doctrines,
 “ the use and extent of its precepts, to be
 “ shewn; and therefore, since the canon
 “ with great reason requires not only that
 “ you examine, but *instruct* the children
 “ in the Catechism, I hope you will think
 “ this a very necessary part of your in-
 “ struction. As to the manner of it, it
 “ may be different not only in different
 “ places, but in the same place at different
 “ times. Sometimes a short exposition of
 “ the more difficult expressions may deserve
 “ the preference: again, asking them ques-
 “ tions relating to each part, and causing
 “ them to learn texts of scripture proving
 “ each answer, will be always of great be-
 “ nefit.

“nefit. Further, the words of the Catechism
 “itself may be broken into short questions
 “and answers, to which others may be
 “added out of the many good expositions
 “that have been made public.” The
 archbishop then proceeds to the excuses
 frequently made for not attending dili-
 gently to this work, “that in some places
 “it is pleaded the children cannot read,
 “and their parents cannot, or will not, have
 “them taught :” but here I shall close his
 valuable directions for the present, by ob-
 serving, that the *last* inconvenience is in a
 great degree happily removed in *this* place,
 through God’s great goodness, in providing
 a most benevolent friend to the *female* chil-
 dren of the parish, who acts upon such pious
 principle in this good work, as to assure it
 a continuance, and fair hope of blessing
 upon it, to those disposed to profit by it;
 and from the further appointment I have
 in view, by the Christian assistance of se-
 veral worthy characters, I have pleasing
 hope that the *boys* of our poorer brethren
 will also shortly experience a fuller oppor-
 tunity of improving in useful knowledge
 than

than has been hitherto afforded them. In respect to the before-mentioned lady, her unwearied zeal for the temporal and spiritual interests of these needy and neglected children, in clothing them, and providing them with schooling, exhibits the soundness of her faith by active virtue, and binds many who now hear me to continual returns of the humblest service towards such a friend. Would to God that ye were properly sensible of the Lord's kindness to you in this particular ; then would some of you be more grateful to your generous benefactress. I am sorry, to their shame, to observe that it is far otherwise. As to those who have grace to be sensible of the value of such an instrument for their comfort, I hope and doubt not but their humble and earnest prayers are constantly employed for her preservation.

There is but one way to reduce the desperately wicked to order ; and ingratitude is the basest of all wickedness : when every humane and religious method fails, the infliction of those wholesome laws which, God be praised, we have yet in store, must be enforced.

enforced. Remember, therefore, that the
 “magistrate doth not bear the sword in
 “vain;” and be assured, I will not fail to
 apply to that power on every occasion that
 deserves it, when milder methods will not
 do, and daring wickedness calls for public
 punishment: at the same time, you may
 also depend upon the kindest and most con-
 scientious regard to every thing in my
 power for the ease and comfort of those
 whose conduct merits indulgent notice.

2. I will now deliver to you the joint
 sentiments of the other prelate I likewise
 mentioned, who was brought up at the feet
 of this Christian Gamaliel; and, in imita-
 tion of so excellent a master, has lately pub-
 lished the following admonition to us *
 under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

“As to the lowest, and most laborious
 “classes of people, they have seldom either
 “leisure or ability to educate their children
 “well. And unless the public and the
 “clergy take the care upon themselves, the
 “probability is, that they will have no

* The author at that time served a cure in his lord-
 ship’s diocese.

“education

“ education at all. The usual mode of
 “ instructing them in religion, when they
 “ *are* brought in the way of it, is by means
 “ of the Church Catechism: this at first
 “ can be nothing more than teaching the
 “ children to repeat it by heart ; but as
 “ they grow up, and their understandings
 “ open, it should be explained to them in
 “ the easiest and most familiar terms, should
 “ be placed before them in various points
 “ of view, and brought down to the level
 “ of their humble capacities, so as to make
 “ them comprehend clearly and distinctly
 “ the grounds and rudiments, the essential
 “ doctrines, and fundamental duties of that
 “ religion, which is to be the guide of their
 “ conduct here, and the means of their
 “ salvation hereafter. This it must be
 “ confessed is a laborious part of duty, but
 “ it is a part so useful, so important, and
 “ so indispensably necessary, that I cannot
 “ forbear pressing it home on your most
 “ serious attention.”

I quote this passage to convince you,
 both how closely our method agrees with
 the rules here laid down, and also, that
 notwithstanding

notwithstanding the dissipation of the times, and the reproachful scoffings and unjust censures of many, the pure and positive means of upholding Christianity, and destroying the kingdom of Satan, still exercises the vigilance and zeal of those whom God hath set over us, to admonish and exhort unto good works,

I will only add one further observation from the archbishop's charge, which, as it so nearly touches the point in question, should not be omitted,

“ A *continued* discourse of some length
 “ may also be requisite on the Catechism of
 “ our church, as it will lay before those
 “ of your parishioners who are come to
 “ riper years a regular description of
 “ Christian doctrines, which they often
 “ want very much for themselves, and will
 “ then be enabled to teach some of it to their
 “ children, after they have heard it together from you.”

As this directly recommends the task I have lately adopted for your religious improvement, and leads immediately to the Second Part of the subject, I will now dismiss
 you,

you, praying God's blessing on what has been said at this time ; that you may profitably digest it, and be seriously prepared for the remainder, when we meet again.

Now, &c.

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S E R-

S E R M O N V.

Introductory Sermon to a Course of Lectures
upon the Church Catechism.

P A R T II.



S E R M O N V.

A C T S, chap. viii. part of ver. 30, 31.

And Philip said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt? And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me?

I Would not paſs ſo indifferent a judgment upon your religious diſpoſition, my friends, as to ſuppoſe it neceſſary to repeat the heads of my former diſcourſe, ſo lately delivered to you upon theſe words, in order to renew any impreſſion of the great conſequence of the ſubject. I have already ſhewn you, from the nature of things, from fact, from ſcripture, and the testimony of the beſt and wiſeſt men, both of former and more modern times, the value of early inſtruction in religious knowledge: I ſhall therefore proceed immediately to the ſecond diviſion of my ſubject, and endeavour to

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make

make it equally clear, that it is, in a great degree, through neglect of this essential article of education, that when youth grow up they are so easily led astray, and estranged from the service of that church in which they were born and bred.

First then, as a falling off from regular attendance upon public worship in the church is become too common in many places, and by those who have, in other respects, the report of being sober and seriously inclined persons ; and as I am concerned to observe it is the case with *some* among ourselves ; it naturally produces an enquiry into the *cause*, and equally inclines us to use our best endeavours to remove it.

It being past all doubt that the doctrines of our excellent church are most purely evangelical ; its service easy to be understood, and at the same time most decent, solemn, and affecting ; it must surely contain abundant food for the exercise of the most devout soul : and from the judicious regularity in which it repeats the whole of the sacred volume ; its prayers and collects ; and the due application of every Christian rite ; no orderly and well-disposed mind
but

but may find matter of exhortation and comfort, reproof and admonition, if they will but give earnest, uniform, and sincere attention to the holy form of worship it administers.

That any should appear dissatisfied with such unexceptionable provision for the soul's health, affords matter of just surprise; and, as the only way to account for a disorder is to trace it to the fountain head, I think we may affirm *one* reason at least for the rise and growth of this very blameable conduct, to be the want of that early instruction I so fully treated in my former discourse; to the deficiency of such a solid foundation of sound principles as would answer every scruple of conscience, reconcile all misgiving fears, uphold the weak, satisfy the doubting, and put to flight a host of fanciful and false alarms, which either the artifice of the Devil, or the infirmity that flesh is heir to, may occasionally raise in wavering or melancholy minds. I am ready to think, I say, that this great error of separating from the established worship will be very much prevented by the humble means already mentioned: but as this will chiefly

afford armour to those who are coming up, they that have already started aside we must endeavour to win back by such methods as their harder case more particularly requires: gentle counsel, seasonable argument, and charitable remonstrance, may possibly work upon *some*; though I am convinced the malady is often inveterate and stubborn: and as it is doubtless more difficult to reclaim one that is prejudiced in a wrong cause, than to keep him in the right at first, we must therefore not slacken in the exercise of every likely means, but exert our best abilities in convincing them of the error and danger of their proceedings, and in vindicating the honour and sufficiency of that church of which we are appointed the ministers. We must, as St. Paul did, become every thing to every man, in a qualified sense of humility of deportment, and charitable advice, that we may regain some: we must, above all things, put up our petitions to Him who alone can give the increase, “that he would make us “pastors according to his own heart.”

Habit has such a powerful effect in every thing, that it may well be termed a *second nature*.

nature. Such as have been persuaded that they cannot receive due information on the Lord's day, to supply the exercise of their minds for the rest of the week, must be supposed possessed of more than ordinary zeal for the things of God's law; and as such probably have been used to indulge this disposition at a distance from their home (however needless such practice), nor are able to give just reasons for the many objections to such conduct (and which I shall speak to presently), it is to be feared, either hypocrisy, perverseness, conceited prejudice, a love of change, or some bad leaven, is at the bottom, if they persist in such unwarrantable desertion, and do not return to the sound and regular forms prescribed for their improvement.

If they *profess* to be of the established church, they should yield respectful preference to its authority, and not "take to themselves teachers of the lowest of the people." They have here the sanction of God's house, where alone his worship ought to be celebrated by those who have enlisted themselves as members of the same.

In the plan I mean to adopt with the

view of weaning some, and preventing others from following these exceptionable customs, I have fixed upon a *day* sanctified by the express order of the church for public service. The additional mode of instruction intended to be employed, to keep such persons within the bounds of regularity, and yet supply their most pious inclinations with salutary food, has been approved by the advice and practice of many of our most exemplary rulers: and it is more particularly designed for the purpose of removing all manner of plea for frequenting promiscuous meetings in unlicensed places, and, if possible, to put a stop to so vain and unjustifiable a custom, which reflects indecently upon the industry or ability of the regular minister, and is highly reprobable upon every principle upon which it can be examined. The humble instrument through whom these helps to the more serious and the ignorant are held out, though he cannot, consistent with a becoming spirit of humility, enlarge upon any peculiar excellence of his own method of consulting their good, may yet safely attest the sincerity of the *desire* towards it, which is inferior in
purity

purity to none who may beguile you with the like assurance, and to whose care you in no respect belong : and, without the least impropriety, I may add, you will have a satisfaction which no self-created teacher can assure, “ that every thing is done decently and in order ; ” that you are serving God in a regular way, under one who has received due authority to instruct you, and therefore you may more reasonably expect a blessing upon your sincere pursuits after further knowledge of God’s will. Lastly, the *hour* fixed for the above good purpose interferes neither with the labour of your respective callings (which is a duty God equally requires you to be truly diligent in following), nor with the very necessary care of your families during that portion of time you have to spare from the close of work to the hour of rest, which must be lost to *them*, if you are roaming about the country at late hours (however good the intention), and which cannot be avoided by those who are carried away by the attraction of various preachers. Whoever advises you, from a false judgment of the true way of pursuing the *one thing*

needful, that the *good will* makes up for every other deficiency, advises you against reason, and scripture which is founded on reason ; because scripture cannot contradict itself, and because nothing is essentially good which tends to defeat a greater good : and it will certainly prove more profitable to you, *on all accounts*, to provide diligently for the welfare of your children at home (since you are told in God's word, that " he who taketh not care of his own house " hath denied the faith, and is worse than " an infidel"), than any thing you can hear from those whose conduct leads to disorder and confusion, and who are no ways justified to set up for guides, but are as the *blind leading the blind* into error and mischief.

You will please to observe at the same time, that I am addressing only those of our own community who may need such exhortation : I have nothing to do with them *that are without* ; I only wish they would keep to themselves, and not interfere with a business that belongs to others. I would merely exert my mite to remedy errors that have been introduced amongst
ourselves ;

ourselves ; and to this end, when I turned in my mind the probable means of favouring the zeal of some to good purpose, nothing seemed more promising to remove any actual complaint of wanting information in holy things, than to commence a weekly lecture, in a familiar and instructive manner, upon the first principles of our Christian faith and practice, as contained in the Catechism of our church : thus, by complying with the wishes of those who appear more piously disposed than others, an opportunity would be given of removing prejudices that may have taken place in uninformed, and otherwise well-meaning minds ; at least, all just pretence of going *abroad* in search of spiritual instruction, or inviting other ministers to violate their regular engagements, would be silenced : and this leads me to state and consider the many objections to such a practice. I shall state them separately, and argue upon them fairly.

First, then, let us attend to the value of a regular ministry, and establish its institution and good effects from scripture.

“ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing
“ through

“ through the word of God,” saith the apostle ; and if we change the order of the words a little, it will still follow in a good sense, and *how shall they hear without a preacher ?* and *how shall they preach without they are sent ?* Now the want of this help, I humbly trust, cannot with any truth be asserted to be *your* case ; and it will, by God’s blessing, become still less so : a *preacher* you have upon the spot, whom it is your duty to hear, and mind ; and he is *sent* with every sanction of order, and decent authority, as derived from divine and apostolical institution : but if, after all, ye will keep away from God’s house, the sin will be your own. All scripture must be interpreted consistently, and connectedly ; and as we are thereby taught that we must not do evil that good may come of it, so every practice that may help to sow dissension in the general body, and establish a bad example to the weak, is not praiseworthy, but *wrong*. “ We are not to use
 “ our liberty that a weak brother may offend ;” much less is it justifiable to depart from the observing of such rules as
 are

are necessary “ to keep us together in unity
“ of spirit, and the bond of peace.”

The *means* of a due qualification for any office are not the less valuable, though they may be neglected or abused by the possessors; but he who has them, and employs them in the work they are calculated to promote, is certainly better qualified for a respectable and useful discharge of his office than those who neither have, nor ever can attain to them, and therefore are too apt to lower their value, or obliged to supply their use by bolder pretensions to still superior gifts. But upon whom can this pass? Only upon those as ignorant as such people themselves, and who are slaves to credulous weakness; and because they do not possess the needful benefits of education, they misapply scripture to depreciate these gifts and blessings of God. For instance, when they would avail themselves of such texts as this—“ Not many learned “ are called;” which is by no means spoken to lessen the excellence of the human faculties, or the necessity of the *means* to cultivate them, but only to guard against the *perversion* of the talent, and prevent its
being

being directed to a different purpose than it is calculated to effect ; which is to explain the word, and exalt and spread the glory of God, the giver of every good gift.

At all times the people are ready to call for a *sign*, from every professor of public ministry. The sign of John the Baptist was the history of his birth and alliance, and that “ he did *many wonders*,” and was expressly deputed as a messenger “ to prepare the way of the Lord.” Our blessed Saviour also appealed to his miracles, and desired “ to be believed for his works sake.” The power and authority of the first apostles were likewise established by the *same means* : they had the *extraordinary* gift of the Holy Spirit poured upon them ; and with *them* the test of *miracles ceased*. But even in our Saviour’s time there were such things as *lying wonders* ; and, to guard us against the impostures of unqualified men, when his disciples applied to him for advice concerning such as seemed to them to need rebuke, his answer shewed, that respecting such as could not produce the signs of regular appointment, or that positive ordination which his immediate followers possessed,

possessed, of *them* it was required to "work
 "a miracle in his name." And they who
 still have not this due qualification, which
 has descended in successive order from
 Christ and his apostles, do often pretend to
 preternatural gifts; but with what shew of
 truth or reason we need only judge from
 the assurance just now delivered, that with
 the apostles all miracles were at an end.

If any should weakly build upon the
 ambiguous meaning of *words*, and assert, in
 vindication of unwarrantable liberty to em-
 ploy the sacred function, that St. Paul as-
 serts, "that so Christ was preached," it was
 matter of rejoicing to him, even "though
 "it was of strife;" we need only refer
 them to Phil. ch. ii. ver. 3, to clear him of
 any improper or dangerous meaning: "Let
 "nothing be done," says he, "through strife
 "or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind
 "let each esteem other better than them-
 "selves." The apostle cannot be supposed
 to write so inconsistently, as to commend
 and disclaim strife almost in the same breath,
 or that where he employs that word, in
 chap. i. of this epistle, he means thereby
 to afford sanction to an *uncommissioned* ex-
 ercise

ercise of preaching; but in the above speech he only alludes to a set of Jewish converts, who had turned themselves to preaching, chiefly from opposition to *him*; not being willing to allow that he was more particularly *set for the defence of the gospel* than they; and thus levelling, as many now do, the value of a positive commission, which these converts wanted: but, in a commendable warmth for the extending of his Master's name on earth, when he rejoices that it spread at any rate, we cannot imagine him to mean it in the spirit of encouraging *irregular proceedings*, without a manifest contradiction of his own *repeated principles*. But, after all, the apostle was not devoid of human frailty; he held *the gift in an earthly vessel*, as the best do, and the vehemence of his zeal might sometimes transport him to unguarded utterance. Even, in his truly pious wish to become more serviceable to the cause of Christ, the removal of the supposed impediment was judged improper by HIM *whose grace was sufficient* under any infirmity, and the *thorn* was suffered to *continue*, “ to humble him,
 “ left

“ left he should be exalted above measure.”

The conduct of our blessed Master himself, the perfect pattern of our best endeavours, who knew the “ end of all strife,” that it “ is as one that letteth out water,” is highly worthy both our admiration and imitation. At the same time that he discovereth a spirit of toleration, most needful to be cultivated by all his true disciples, it is restrained within the bounds of *caution* and *due authority*; though he commands his apostles *not to forbid* them, he gives no encouragement to *follow* them, and to leave the original fold in which they were brought up; though he asserts, that such as are not *against* him are on his side, he requires some vouchers to supply the place of regular commission, as before observed; and even should this be injudiciously wrested as *some* authority for *itinerant preaching*, it could only apply to that *particular* time, when *miracles* were performed by those who so fully believed in Christ, on report of all his mighty works, as by virtue of their extraordinary faith in him to obtain so high a power: and it is further to be observed, that

that the different orders of the ministry were not then specifically settled. Since the time of Christ and his apostles, the extraordinary influence of the Holy Ghost is not to be expected; the faithful and diligent use of the *ordinary* means of grace will abundantly qualify for such a discharge of duty, in this state of trial, as to prepare us for the reward promised to those who “ walk “ in the commandments of the Lord “ blameless.”

As therefore preternatural proofs of qualification for the office of the ministry cannot be pretended to without the highest presumption, bordering upon enthusiasm and profaneness, and in truth are wholly needless, so we must look for some other sufficient licence to undertake it; and this can only be in apostolical institution, as is abundantly proved throughout the writings of the first apostles, and which took its rise in virtue of their Lord's own example in openly delegating them to act: for as *St. Paul* saith, “ God hath set some in the church, “ first apostles;” and in the earliest days, after Christ was taken from them, they proceeded to appoint the different orders of the ministry.

ministry. One full text in point, in the words of the same inspired apostle, to that order of men who were to *continue* the *outward* qualification in regular succession, is as effectual as a *thousand*: “ The things “ which thou hast heard of me, commit “ them to faithful men, who shall be able “ to teach others.” And again: “ Ordain “ elders in every city, as I have appointed “ thee.” This is enough to satisfy any reasonable person, that no other pretensions are valid, but such as have an outward commission. Other proofs to the same effect are equally numerous, as clear and powerful: a few will serve our present purpose; though in a day when so many unlettered preachers are about, when even *women* of the lowest class affect to have THEIR PEOPLE, and assume the public office of the ministry, the scripture cannot be too much employed to *prevent* the unwary from being deluded, and to strengthen the wavering from following these self-sufficient guides.

In the second epistle of St. Paul to Timothy, chap. ii. ver. 5, he asserts, that “ if any “ man strive for the mastery, he is not “ crowned unless he strive *LAWFULLY*.”

In chap. iv. ver. 3, he prophesies “ that a
 “ time will come, when they will not en-
 “ dure sound doctrine ; but after their own
 “ lusts (*i. e.* fond and vain desires) shall
 “ HEAP TO THEMSELVES teachers, having
 “ itching ears.” And in his epistle to
 Titus, chap. i. he admonishes him “ to hold
 “ fast the faithful word he had been taught,
 “ because there were many UNRULY and
 “ vain talkers, and deceivers, whose mouth
 “ should be stopped ;” and he advises him
 “ to rebuke such sharply.” If you wish
 to know the “ form of sound doctrine,
 “ which cannot be withstood, irreproach-
 “ able,” consult the whole of chap. ii. of
 this epistle. And what is further recom-
 mended to the same disciple, who was one
 of the first fathers of the church, is, “ that
 “ he should affirm constantly, that they
 “ who believe in God should be careful to
 “ maintain good works.” And in regard
 to *women*, he “ commandeth that they
 “ should learn in silence with all subjec-
 “ tion :” and again (probably from some
 vain attempts of the kind even in those
 days) he adds, “ But I suffer not a woman
 “ to teach, nor to usurp authority, but to
 “ learn

“learn silence.” And to another of his churches he orders, “that the women should keep silence, for it is not permitted them to speak, for it is a shame for a woman to speak in a church,” or congregation. And to conclude his sentiments of the different conduct he recommends to this part of his converts, he closes the advice with, “Let all things be done decently, and in order.”

St. James assures us, upon this point of division, “that where envying and strife is, there is confusion;” which leads me to shew you further, the danger of attending to such as are not lawfully ordained to the work of the ministry: and St. Paul adds his confirmation of the same, “that God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, in all the churches of the saints.” Without availing myself, therefore, of the advantage derived from the authority of the earliest custom, and the variety of facts which ingenious study might furnish, to strengthen this side of the question, I rather build the whole defence of the argument upon the positive testimony of *scripture only*; because that is open to you all,

and level to your understandings, as far as it is applied: and as that clearly directs you to what order of teachers it is safest to attend, and abundantly discourages all false pretensions to usurp an office of so serious a cast, through the vain dependance upon *private* calls; as likewise all self-created ministers, whose authority has neither miraculous test, or the regular succession of holy ordinance to support it; I shall proceed to point out the manifest danger to yourselves of yielding to the vain fancies of such persons, and that from the general mode and tendency of their conduct.

As the free gifts of nature, independent of cultivation, are equally bestowed on the generality of mankind; so their natural views and pretensions, unless restrained by *positive* laws and institutions, which form the basis of social order and happiness, equally impel them to aim at preference and power: now the levelling that submission which is due to any kind of establishment, that can plead the authority of divine ordinance, and which has been subscribed to by general consent, must inevitably

ably open a flood-gate to licentious liberty and confusion, and reduce the community to the wild and barbarous state of ungovernable equality; and the meanest labourer, in the fervor of deluded fancy, may conceive himself equally capable and qualified to teach, as any other who has no better testimony to shew than his own persuasions: for as to *education*, when that can be supplied by so powerful a substitute as immediate inspiration, every man, on the principles of original equality, and the insufficiency of order and outward commission, lays claim to similar privilege and benefit. And if some, who have had all the advantages of learning, can yet descend to encourage such an error in this respect, no wonder the ignorant and bold should transgress the bounds of decency and order; for all must be concluded strictly deserving such a description, who impiously invade the sacred office, and deal out their indigested doctrines with presumptuous freedom. “ From such, my friends, I warn “ you to turn aside:” and my reason is, because you will most likely be told by such persons, what will prejudice you from
I 3 attending

attending your own holy church, confuse your thoughts, and unsettle your minds.

As for instance, in many of these private conventicles, and by these self-formed teachers, you will hear the whole body of the regular clergy occasionally held forth in a contemptible light ; the weakest and most presumptuous pleas advanced for the preference of their own fraternity, and our mode of preaching objected to, as not being under any influence of the spirit of God, a favour they arrogate to themselves in a high degree ; and one proof they give of this is, because it has not the test of extempore delivery : the most silly and falsest argument ; as if every good man did not ask God's blessing upon his professional labours, and that it was not as necessary to a *written* discourse, as to every religious exertion whatsoever ; or as if the value of God's gifts of understanding, and his blessing in the mighty benefits derived from good education, did not form an eminent portion of the *Divine favour*.

Let us now coolly and candidly determine which has the *best mark* of the *Divine*

vine concurrence and gracious aid ; a discourse partaking of all the essential ingredients to render it *safe, intelligible*, and to God's *honour*, and the important interests of his servants ; or a jumble of indigested subjects, needless repetitions, and low comparisons, often interrupted by actual deficiency, both as to utterance and matter, notwithstanding the boasted assistance of the spirit ; and, to speak most charitably, so often intermixed with offensive observation and downright nonsense, that if the whole was taken down, and shewn to the inspired orator at a little distance of time, he would be justly ashamed of the composition, most probably disown it, nor venture to allow it those signs of that immediate unerring influence, which can never be the author of confusion and absurdities. But even were these discourses *connected, eloquent*, and without any of the objections above mentioned, which may be the case with some, where thought, talent, and study, distinguish the performance ; yet this is no more a proof of the spirit being more particularly concerned in producing these compositions, than in one from manuscript, the effect of de-

liberation, judgment, and correction; for men have their various natural talents. The apostle saith, "No man can call Jesus "Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Does it matter whether I make this confession with a book before me, or without one? He saith further, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit;" which is proof enough that no preference is due, *merely* for talking by rote, not even though the matter should be intelligible and edifying. Again, "The manifestation of the "spirit is given to every man to profit "withal." Now which bids fairest to possess the manifestation of a wise and teaching spirit, and to furnish *profit* to the hearers; that which is an object of respect, and will bear examination, or that which is often an object of ridicule, and can stand no sound enquiry? I leave the decision to your own impartial sentence.

The greatest hypocrite may have the natural faculty of a good memory, and the knack of extemporizing; may be possessed of audacious confidence and strong nerves; while the most holy man alive, and the most religiously

gioufly informed, could not be prevailed upon to deliver a sermon, without his notes, in public, upon any consideration; and, though perhaps with every other qualification for the task but constitutional audacity, might possibly fail was he to attempt it. But if this man's life is upright, if his example is profitable, if his doctrine is founded upon evangelical principle, is he to be degraded as not being yet *taught of God*? None but fools or fanatics will assert it. Thus you see, my friends, how you may be gulled out of the evidence of your own understandings.

But further, there is a great deal in early *habit*, as well as peculiar gift; and it will not admit of doubt, but that men of genius might in a *degree* avail themselves of the advantage of prompt delivery in the pulpit, as in other oratory, was it the custom to have it early practised, and that without the additional effect of inspiration; though in *solemn* charges, perhaps, the more circumspect and guarded method is the best.

To vary the subject of uncharitable reflection, and invidious censure, and rather than

than *not* indulge this usual talent by this lower class of teachers, when the *minister* does not afford fair game, they will fall foul of our *public service*; they often object to some hard words that may be found therein: now the same exceptions may be advanced with equal propriety and weight against many parts of our translation of the Bible itself. The word *schism*, for example, gives great offence, has a host of enemies, and it is very natural it should; for who is over fond of a word which conveys immediate reproach and censure (and so very justly) upon his own misconduct in this particular? No schismatic consequently (*i. e.* no needless separatist from the church in which he was born and bred) will praise the application of this term, because it bears so hard against *himself*. It is therefore highly politic in all such to conjure some mischief in this outlandish sound, which may work a prejudice in the ignorant multitude.

You have heard this word explained so often, that did it not immediately concern this portion of my address, it would be needless to repeat it. It is derived from
the

the Greek language, and signifies literally a *division* or *separation*, as applied in a fair religious sense : it is branded in scripture as a very heinous crime, for which good reason our church prays particularly to guard her members from it ; and it is no wonder, therefore, that all who wish to be thought *extraordinary* good, should object to its being applied to *them*. It does not so essentially concern our Christian brethren, the dissenters of this age, who have been educated for generations under a different ecclesiastical form, as it does the *daily separatists* before alluded to. *These* objectors have a most *curious* method of shifting this charge off themselves upon *us*, though they had no existence before, but in that body which they proceed daily to dismember ; nay, they would join the *general* foe of Protestants, by involving all alike in the charge of schism, rather than allow themselves offenders in this article. They make no distinction between a disunion for the most dangerous errors and unscriptural practices, and division for the most trivial causes : they would have the single opinion of a whimsical individual

carry

carry as much authority as the sentiments of a nation, confirmed by the act of the whole legislature, upon scriptural decision. But I think it proper to repeat, that I would here draw a line between the regular Presbyterian and the conceited modern innovator. Liberty of conscience, in following the tenets of our ancestors, is a just object of toleration, however desirable it might be that we were "all of one mind:" but wantonly to desert the venerable form of worship so long established by Divine Providence; the peculiar church of our country, in whose bosom our forefathers have lived and died, and wrought out their salvation, and that without better plea than a rage for novelty; to be zealous in alienating others from their duty in this respect, and in following every low and vain pretender to superior excellence, is so very contradictory to good sense and a safe conscience, that no apology can be admitted for *such* schismatics.

But if words of learned sound and derivation could reasonably be allowed good ground for contention and division, the word *apostle* is just as open to the weak exceptions

ceptions of a dissatisfied caviller; for it is equally remote from strict relationship to our native tongue. Perhaps the mere English title of *messenger* might be better suited to their purpose; but as we are not justified in crediting a messenger, before he gives full proof of his being commissioned by the master he pretends to serve, so nothing would be gained by change of words, while their sense remained unalterable. In short, there would be no end of instances, to shew the effect of injudicious zeal, to what poor shifts it is reduced, and what trifles it builds upon for its defence.

Another danger from attending these irregular teachers, is the pernicious influence of the *doctrines* that are maintained by many of them. I shall touch but very slightly on this mischief at present, as you are occasionally guarded against it, whenever the tendency of the following tenets can with propriety be introduced in the course of my general instruction from this place. But as *any* proper notice of this part of the subject would take up more of your time than is reasonable to require, after what I
have

have already said ; and that what I have to observe will furnish ample matter for another discourse ; I shall defer the concluding articles of admonition for your instruction when we meet again.

Now, &c.

28 SE60

S E R.

S E R M O N VI.

Introductory Sermon to a Course of Lectures
upon the Church Catechism.

P A R T III.



S E R M O N VI.

A C T S, chap. viii. part of ver. 30, 31.

And Philip said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt? And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me?

IN my two former diſcourſes upon theſe words, I contrived ſuch a diviſion of the ſubject as might contribute to impreſs your minds with a diſtinct apprehenſion of the principles I recommended to your cultivation; the practices I could wiſh you to avoid, as being not only needleſs, but unprofitable; the great value of an early and ſound foundation; and the ſafety of adhering to that form of worſhip in which you have been educated. I concluded my laſt diſcourſe at that part which treated of the danger that often proceeds from an injudicious management of deep and myſterious doctrines, by unlearned men, to ig-

norant hearers. The particular tenets I then alluded to, were those of the people called Antinomians; and the favourers of unconditional election and reprobation. By the first are meant, the *enemies of the law*, or those who cry down the value of good works, pretending such doctrine is too apt to raise the creature in his own esteem, and who exalt the *all sufficiency of faith*, as being best calculated to humble him; by which a dangerous inference may be drawn by the ignorant and wicked, that as the purchase is secured, little can be done on our part towards it; thus *rending asunder* what God has *eternally joined together*. Whereas the only *end* of faith must be good works, and *without* them it is dead to all intents and purposes. But this will always be a favourite doctrine with the idle and presumptuous, who are encouraged to continue in evil habits, from a false notion in what *shape and degree every thing is done for them*; from a delusion, that they have a certain remedy at hand that will qualify their remissness; and the virtue of which is sufficient, if they can but *persuade* themselves they have a *part* in it:

though

though our blessed Lord himself declares, all such will call upon him in vain, “ who “ do not the works that he hath commanded.” From want of powers to distinguish, religious subjects are confused by illiterate men, and perverted by the equally ignorant congregation; and, through the joint readiness of the heart to err, many are hereby led to commit glaring immoralities, while they profess the purest faith. In short, by lowering the spirit of *striving* after holiness, *i. e.* working out our salvation with fear and trembling, they overthrow the pillars of the gospel, justice, mercy, and humility, and encourage a false and dangerous hope. There can be but one sure mark of our belonging unto Christ, and that is partaking of his spirit; and the only proof of *this* is to bring forth the *fruits* of it. “ Ye cannot bring forth fruit, except “ ye abide in me,” saith our Lord: the consequence is, if ye *do* abide in him, ye will produce good fruit; and if “ ye do not, ye “ are none of his.” Therefore, let them tell you what they will, if ye do not Christ’s commands, ye cannot be said to belong to him, and he will deny all such at the last

day, whatever appearance they may make of violent zeal at present. Now God's commandments, or the moral law, and Christ's, *must* be one and the same thing; because we know Christ did not come to *make void the law*, but to fulfil it: and his influence and design is to *prepare to himself a people zealous of good works*, the practice of which will train and qualify them before hand to enjoy the exercise of further purity and holy love in heaven.

The other doctrine I alluded to, as equally dangerous, if misunderstood, is commonly termed *predestination*. This leads to a fond and curious diving into, and bold decision upon, the hidden counsels of the Almighty from everlasting; which being often most indiscreetly handled, and as ignorantly applied, tends to promote either false security, or fatal despondency, and may dishearten many from persevering in the plain paths of uprightness, or occasion an indulgence in sloth: whereas, the only decrees that can concern, or will affect the creatures of a wise and merciful Creator, are such as proceed in consequence of a *just condition*, either respecting our reward or punishment; which

which will prove our fate according as we have employed the gracious means to obtain the one, or, by neglecting them, have deserved the other; and this implies the nature of a covenant, or solemn treaty, which is the sound and scriptural sense in which I believe the gospel has always been received by sober reason; for all engagements do necessarily suppose conditions. In short, we may thus far safely conclude, from our belief of God's perfections, that from all eternity he hath predestinated or appointed the humble and upright to a state of peace and happiness, and the wicked to destruction. But he declareth himself, "that he is no respecter of persons; that he desireth not the death of any sinner; and that ALL who WORK RIGHTEOUSNESS will be accepted in Christ Jesus."

Now as many of these persons, who take upon them to go preaching about the country, are under no proper jurisdiction, and consequently out of the reach of remonstrance or reproof; and as in the scripture, especially in St. Paul's epistles (in which they deal considerably), there are many things "hard to be understood;" they

bend, and twist, and level these points according to their own particular opinions, and uncultivated understanding: for having no knowledge of the original language in which they were at first conveyed, and being above the consideration of particular *times, circumstances, and occasions*, which lead to a just discovery of their design and application, they interpret them feverally as the letter strikes upon their unqualified judgment, or *give* a sense of their own where they are incapable of finding that of the apostle.

These passages are liable to various constructions, according to the genius and ingenuity of the interpreter: and though these preachers may be classed under several distinctions, who profess in *general* a different sentiment from that I am immediately opposing; yet as the mind of man is free, and few but have a peculiar and partial opinion upon particular points, according to constitutional complexion and early prejudice, which governs the main tendency of his doctrine, I would only appeal to any present, who may have attended different orators of this stamp, what a confusion

fusion of notions, what perplexity of thought, you have experienced from their different methods of treating the same thing; if they have not almost prevented you from the use of thought at all. To a great number of such we may most aptly apply the apostle's description: "Of teachers neither understanding what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

From these causes the mind becomes *unsettled*, principles are at variance, and, for want of early and solid foundation (which I maintain would keep men steady to their mother church), they go in search of different information, get an habit and fondness for variety, are daily entangled in fresh difficulties, and become less capable of relishing the plain and substantial truths which those *who run may read*, and which, with prayer to God to bless their humble and hearty endeavours, could not fail to invite his further favour, and prepare them for a place in his heavenly kingdom.

To expose *all* the inconveniences and danger of these innovations in religion would be endless. I will only offer you some few proofs of its unprofitableness to you in other respects.

God is unchangeable; what he has once commanded, he must ever expect to be complied with: I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, saith our blessed Lord. He who was with the Father, and came from him, and knew his will, and did it, HIM we may safely trust. The commandment says, "six days thou shalt labour, and do all that thou hast to do, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God." Industry in your several callings, and the due care of your families or children, are duties that compose the greatest part of the trial of the labouring man, while he has health and strength: this includes honesty of course; and the gratitude due to God for ability to discharge the task allotted to the several stations his wisdom hath appointed you, is shewn by a regular and humble service to him in his house, where, by the public sanction of the laws, his worship is established, and a power to perform it dispensed to our fellow subjects, who have been educated purposely for that high office, and not where, by an imposition on the lenity of the legislature, that liberty is usurped.

In acquitting yourselves thus conscientiously, you are serving God acceptably. Such a conduct further implies resignation to God's will, and becoming praise for his mercy, in affording you such a decent mode of serving him; humility, sobriety, and contentment in yourselves, justice towards them who employ you, and good example to your neighbours. And though you may be told, the secret pleasure ever flowing from such indispensable duties, and sincere endeavours, favour too much of building up *your own righteousness*, and magnifying the *works of the law*; depend upon it, these are the fruits of a sound faith: no one can perform them uniformly and permanently, who is not convinced they are necessary for his soul's health; and they who have them not, though they had faith to remove mountains, may at last call upon those mountains in vain to cover them from the vengeance that pursueth unrighteousness and presumption, when they find their nakedness *without* them, their want of the true wedding garment, and that these are the materials of which it should have been made. Now every thing that interferes
with

with the fulfilling of these necessary duties, let the plea be ever so plausible, is faulty, and to be avoided.

Regularity and rest are the springs that afford strength and spirits for work; if these times are broke in upon, by going some miles to hear a famous preacher, and continuing there some hours, both mind and body must return fatigued, and the care required at home of course neglected: it must, in the nature of things, afford an excuse for *some* idleness the next day, the hours of repose and rising being thus changed; an habit of neglecting your daily employments will be insensibly contracted, and the resources of support being lessened, your families must suffer proportionably. But supposing what you go to hear had none of the objections I have specified, and was equally inoffensive in matter, manner, and effect, the faculties of men, especially after hard labour has exhausted the powers of the body, are no ways equal to so long an attention upon one thing, without yielding to the weakness of nature; in which case the profit can be nothing, and it would be much easier and better to sleep
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at *home* : or if otherwise, what is occasionally collected between slumber and attention will be so imperfect, as to afford no real benefit. Be assured, my friends, whatever you may have been persuaded to hope, your utmost zeal in these unseasonable exercises will never atone for your perverse neglect of the *plain* and *positive* obedience of the commandment.

But further, *nightly* preachments are open to great objections on other accounts, however defended by some pious motives. 1st. No exception of any persons can be made, with any degree of propriety, where the word of God is made the reason of assembling ; which often brings together a strange mixture of characters ; is sometimes the cause of rude disorder, and the profanation of the most holy things : and if this does not happen in the very spot, all such meetings by night lead to a sort of riot both in collecting, and when they are dismissed, very inconsistent with a solemn assembly : I speak from known fact. Again, as from the very principle of a view to *conversion*, none can be refused, as before observed, many must be admitted, who (without any breach
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of

of charity), it is well known, go with no pious purpose; curiosity, perhaps, the least exceptionable design; and the familiarities, and opportunities of temptation, from the society of good, bad, and indifferent, in dark and solitary journeys, often lays the foundation of more vice than virtue. But,

2dly, What is more to the purpose; we find no positive authority, encouragement, or countenance, for such superfluous practices throughout all the history of our blessed Master's ministry; which as it is the true source from whence any religious exertion can safely flow, so is it the armour they would use to defend every species of extraordinary zeal. Now I know but of *one* instance (and that not solicited by himself) of our Lord's renewing the exercise of his heavenly doctrine *by night*; it is in the case of Nicodemus, who, it is to be observed, came of his own accord, and *singly*, and on a matter of *private* enquiry; and yet, as our blessed Saviour urges our diligence, by "warning us of the season when "no man can work," consequently he would have lost no time himself. His stay was but about three years upon the earth

earth as a public teacher; and no one, I apprehend, will account him *slack* in his Father's business during that time. Nay, who can be supposed more earnest in the cause of its advancement than the blessed *Author* of the religion? And as he had the means of supernatural help, as is evident from his long fasting and working of miracles, doubtless he would have used his power in this particular instance of more incessant preaching, had he judged the example necessary, or had not known that the frame of mere mortal men was too weak to bear it with any profitable effect. Rest, retirement, private prayer, and meditation, are all clearly warranted by our Lord's example; who after the close of day declined any further intercourse with the people, whom he must reasonably have concluded to have retired also for the wholesome purposes already mentioned. But now that his church is happily planted, the uninterrupted means, and due *return* of those means, render all such labours needless; and on the sabbath more particularly. Any encouragement of these superfluous novelties must necessarily interfere with the incumbent

cumbent duties before specified, as so very essentially binding upon you all ; they *must* be neglected while you are attending elsewhere : the most religiously disposed person will find abundant opportunities at home of exercising pious inclinations.

Do not uncharitably attribute any thing I have said to idle or lukewarm principles ; but receive it as a sober and sincere regard for your best moral and religious obligations. I have declared to you, according to the light I have, what I honestly think right, and safe, in my own present conduct : I have held up to you the pattern of the divine Jesus ; I cannot propose to you a better guide.

If you have that zeal for pleasing God, as many pretend, and are truly desirous of doing good in your generation, I would humbly advise you to let these valuable principles shew themselves in a different way. Whatever time you have to spare between the hours of leaving work and repose, you will always find something to keep you from being idle, for their good who depend entirely upon your diligence. In *religious* exercise, nothing can be a more pleasing

ing sacrifice to the great and glorious Author of your being, than instructing your children; teaching them an early habit of worshipping their Maker; talking to them of his goodness; and giving them lessons of sobriety, modesty, honesty, and contentment, by your *example* as well as speech. "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing," is the advice of the apostle; but *preach* without ceasing is the fashion of those who would set up for reformers in these days: prayer with them is quite a secondary thing, and, from the practice of some, should seem of no account; since we know that, even among those professing an excess of holiness in other respects, some will sit in their chimney-corners on the sabbath-day, though the house of God is just at hand, where they might offer up their public supplications to Almighty God, in the communion of that church, of which they most unworthily assert themselves to be pious members. Thus they hardly allow the benefit of prayer one day in the week; though the same apostle, as if he had been describing the future model of our excellent liturgy, exhorts, "that
" first

“ first of all, supplications, prayers, inter-
 “ cessions, and giving of thanks, be made
 “ for all men; for kings, and all in au-
 “ thority; that we may lead a quiet and
 “ peaceable life: for this is good and accept-
 “ able in the sight of God our Saviour.”

Now, as the apostle would never have pre-
 scribed what was impossible to be done in a
 strict literal sense, without breaking in upon
 other duties, we must look for the true
 meaning of this precept of *constant prayer*;
 for if it had not been necessary, neither
 would he have advised it. The prayer here
 meant, in the *former* words of the apostle,
 is not a frequent or continued repetition of
 formal worship, which belongs more pro-
 perly to the *public* service of the Deity, as
 instanced in the *latter* passage, but the
 prayer of the *heart*; the short and true
 meaning of which is, *the will turned to*
God; that kind of prayer which would
 have preserved our first parents innocent,
 and qualifies every action and suffering of
 us their fallen posterity. *This* prayer is as
 much in the power of the most ignorant,
 as of the greatest scholar; it requires no
 depth of thought, nor even knowledge of
 letters:

letters: the lonely shepherd in the field, the busy workman in the shop, the most polished courtier in the most splendid company, may equally employ it, and, by using it with sincerity of heart, render it acceptable to God; for as he is every where present, fills all space, ordereth all events, and knoweth all things, we may lift up our hearts, without being observed by any but Him who searcheth the heart; we may implore protection in a single wish; we may declare our praises by a grateful thought; we may be in the world, “and “our conversation yet in heaven:” in this sense we may *pray without ceasing*, and be sure of being heard; and I have given you this explanation, to shew that you are without excuse, if you cease to petition “our Father who is in heaven.” But this spirit of prayer can never be understood, or cultivated properly, without the benefit of those early and sound principles it has been my business to recommend throughout these several discourses.

Outward, positive worship must likewise be directed by sincerity of heart, to render it acceptable; and it only differs in this,

that it has the obligation of an exprefs command, added to the confcious impulse of our dependance upon God, and an humble trust in his promises: it is equally necessary with the other; “ for where two or three “ are gathered together in his name, there “ he hath promised to be in the midst “ of them.” God hath appointed one day for that purpose, and the remainder of the week he hath, in mercy, as positively fixed for the use of man in the various offices of this life; intimating, by his own wise memorial, that the several duties of his creatures should be confined to the six days allotted them to work. But how few, even of those who would be thought more seriously disposed than other men, obey this exprefs law of their Maker, but turn their backs upon the most holy ordinance he hath instituted for our good, and cut out a law for themselves! They leave undone the thing they are commanded to do; and do what might be left undone, without danger of transgressing. Nay, how few, in comparison, shew any visible alteration in their lives, or in the conduct of their children, with all their seeming zeal! How many,
after

after attending *hours* at the places I have described, return without retaining *one* connected sentence of what they have been hearing ! And how few can conscientiously declare they never go till they have nothing left undone at home that necessarily concerns the comfort of their husbands, wives, or families ; or that this attendance is *purely uninfluenced* by idle curiosity, by the desire of the *loaves and fishes* (*i. e.* the kind returns made them for this outward shew of piety), and solely from religious motive, and a want of due instruction in their parish churches ! If they would screen themselves under the judicious caution of, “ Martha, “ thou art busy about many things, to the “ neglect of the one thing needful,” the apology will not apply : the employment here reprov'd by our blessed Lord was a busy, needless, and ostentatious display of worldly compliment, in preference of religious knowledge, and not a sober and indispensable attention to the positive wants of a family, pursued in obedience to the divine precept, and of doing *every thing to the glory of God*.

“ Be not righteous over much,” has cer-

tainly a strange *sound* from this place, but it contains very useful *sense*; it advises the valuable lesson of self-examination: it does not signify that it is possible to be *actually too good*; but it directeth to *try the spirits*, and not to depend upon a *mask* of holiness that may adorn and deceive for a *time*, being the work of art, and not a change of nature, but which leaveth the *heart* in the same deformity, as an ugly face continues that borroweth the like covering.

Thus have I discharged what I conceive to be my duty to you on this occasion; at the same time, neither making personal attacks, or uncharitable reproaches, but giving you an affectionate exhortation against the too general and faulty custom of running from place to place, for what you may find abundantly provided in your own church. I have shewn you that it is not needful to your salvation, and may be hurtful to your worldly interests, which it concerns every useful member of society to attend to, consistently with religious regulation. Nor do I verily believe such practice is required of any teacher, or follower; because I no where find reasonable encouragement

for it in the scripture: and Christ having settled his church, and the order of administering his worship, he could never intend any new and valid mode (that in its exercise is hostile to the form God's providence has established), without some prophecy of his own to warrant the practice of it.

I have my reasons for not giving in *this* place any fuller opinion concerning mixed and stated meetings (elsewhere than in the appointed place of worship) by those who are professedly of the established church of this land. The conscience is a monitor that hath a powerful influence in devoutly disposed minds; but the *best may err*. I do not pretend authority to dispute its dictates in other people; but I may be allowed to account for any supposed failure in my own conduct in this respect. *Some* of the many arguments for not countenancing any thing of the kind by my own example, have now been delivered, directed, I most humbly trust, by the purest desire for God's honour, and the preservation of solemn respect to our holy religion: for all pursuits of this cast must surely appear *unnecessary*, if you are only diligent in remembering

what you hear twice on the Lord's day, besides the public examination and instruction of your children. But if any among the more religious are earnest for still further profitable employment of the time their leisure may afford that day, I would suggest a practice that must meet the approbation of every steady mind; and that is, the service being ended, to retire to your own houses, and there, after calling upon God in a short private prayer of praise for the mercies afforded you of serving him, and for grace to profit by it, pass the few hours that remain in discoursing upon these subjects; comparing them (if you can read) with the holy scripture, from which they are faithfully drawn, and urging those who look up to your example to join in application to God in their hearts to enable you to carry your good resolutions into practice. As all truly religious people, like those of a different description, will always be inclined to find each other's company, the inconvenience of wanting learning may be easily repaired, by applying to those who have had the advantage of so useful a part of education: and if not one in the parish
could

could read (desirable as the attainment is), the *heart* and *conscience* remain still the same; the one ever requiring amendment, the other as busy in accusing and admonishing to reform; and both equally open to God. He will not judge you for what you have not, nor can possibly get; but only for what you *have* and *abuse*. Follow then that candle of the Lord as far as it lights you; pray, and strive to improve your corrupted nature; and fear not but all will end happily.

If it is said, that during one part of the year the days afford more time of leisure than the other, after evening service; most of this counsel may be equally followed while you indulge the innocent amusement of walking in the fields, or in occasional visits to your friends. The cheering prospect of the new clothed country, and the manifold beauties and goodness of God's works, will help an humble and religious turn of thought: but the *latter* employment should never interfere, if possible, with the stated hours of divine service; and in the *former*, the most unlearned will find

variety of objects for pious wonder, and grateful praise.

And as to attending these unlicensed meetings being the happy means (as some suppose) of removing the dangerous alternative of frequenting public houses, it is an idle observation; for *no* truly good person will waste their time and money on the Lord's day in such courses, after regularly attending the public worship; but the contrary, from what they are imagined to prevent, is frequently the consequence of these pursuits: when fatigue, society, and refreshment, combine to lead them to these very houses; so that the end is often worse than the beginning.

As for you who *can* read, whose children enjoy the same benefit, it is your duties, when you return from this holy place, to pass a *part* of the remaining day, at least, in the useful exercise of the talents God has pleased to bestow upon you; by consulting his word either in your own persons, or through them, for the general improvement of yourselves and families. These are in *themselves* little religious meetings, supported

ported by propriety, sense, and decency; and, depend upon it, God requires no further as a positive mark of duty to him in this respect. But these are obligations which, as Christian parents, masters, and mistresses, it is incumbent on you to perform; and for the neglect of which you will be accountable at the great day of the Lord.

My good friends, I would risk my own salvation on the event, that if you follow all this counsel uniformly, with an earnest desire to better your lives, in order that you may promote the glory of God; always looking up to HIM, without whom you can do nothing; who endured unto the death, that you through him might obtain victory: if you seriously lay to heart what may be collected from this place, and with a truly humble spirit endeavour to practise it; not building any *merit* from your own righteousness, but seeking his aid, *who worketh in you both to will and do*; and if you constantly use the devout prayers of the church to help you forward in the task and trial of your lives: if you do all this, I say, from a real principle of love to God,
a fear

a fear of offending him, and a regard for the salvation of your souls, you will have passed the sabbath-day religiously and profitably, nor need further instruction from me, or any other person.

And now, having dwelt so long, and very minutely, on the subject of my earnest desire to pursue those plans most likely to store your minds with solid principles of Christian faith, and to direct your steps in the sure way of regular and useful practice, I trust the smallest suspicion cannot remain with any, of my being regardless of your grand concerns.

With God's blessing on my poor endeavours, I shall carefully attend to every essential article that may tend to forward this *one thing needful*, consistent with the conduct of my public charge.

With regard to the many particulars touched upon in this *latter* portion of my address, I could not justify to let pass a proper opportunity of delivering my *free* opinions to you, agreeable to the rules laid down for my professional duties, and that under due application to the throne of grace to direct me for your advancement in true religion

religion and virtue, and, at the same time, to help my own salvation. I now commend you, my friends, to God's blessed guidance and protection; with this renewal of earnest exhortation, and most affectionate advice, that you will not build too much hope on *hearing* of the word (wheresoever, or by whomsoever, it is delivered), but always keep in mind what scripture affirms, in words which cannot be mistaken, "that *not the HEARERS only, but the DOERS, of the word shall be saved.*"

Now, &c.



(177)

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to help my own salvation. I now come
inward you, my friend, to God's blessed
guidance and protection; with this renewal
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advice, that you will not build too much
hope on the strength of the world (whatsoever,
or by whomsoever, it is delivered), but al-
ways keep in mind what scripture affirms,
in words which cannot be mistaken, "that
the word shall be with you, and the power of
it shall be with you."

28 SE60

S E R M O N VII.

Religious principle the best support of civil institutions, and contempt of God's ordinances the cause of national judgments.

A VISITATION SERMON.

Μεγίστην δὲ μοι δοκεῖ διαφορὰν εἶχειν τὸ Ῥωμαίων πολίτευμα πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ἐν τῇ περὶ θεῶν διαλήψει. Καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τὸ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ἐνεδιζόμενον, τὴν συνέχειν τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα.—
Λέγω δὲ τὴν δεσποδαμονίαν. POLYB. lib. 6.

Peculatus ærarii——quamquam gravis est, tamen consuetudine jam pro nihilo habetur.

SALL. de Bell. Jug.

Quid tristes querimoniæ,
Si non supplicio culpa reciditur;
Quid leges sine moribus
Vanæ proficiunt?

HOR.

S E R M O N

Preached at the Anniversary of the
Baptist Church in the City of London
the 14th of May 1781



A VISITATION

By the Rev. Mr. John ...
Pastor of the Baptist Church in the City of London

At the Anniversary of the Baptist Church in the City of London
the 14th of May 1781

And the ...
And the ...
And the ...

...
...
...

S E R M O N VII.

MARK, chap. xii. ver. 17.

And Jesus answering, said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.

WE have here the positive declaration of Jesus Christ himself, upon a subject that nearly concerns every Christian member of society. He who was expressly sent from the Father to teach men his will, and to set them a spotless example of universal good conduct, was certainly qualified to deliver infallible judgment respecting every article of human affairs.

It is observable that those impious cailers, who frequently engaged in the flagitious purpose of insnaring our blessed Master in his speech, and who appear so rashly bent upon excluding themselves from the merciful

ful design of his instructive discourses and heavenly doctrines, endeavoured in this instance to select a question of a very difficult nature : by surprising him into a reply, which, under a reign of oppressive tribute, seemed likely to have escaped a patriotic spirit, and one so exemplary in all he did for the welfare and comforts of his countrymen, they hoped to have found him off his guard ; and, from the most detestable principle that can actuate a human creature, would have made ungrateful accusation the base return for hourly good offices, and (had they succeeded) for an affectionate zeal in the very object of their treachery. But “ he who “ knew what was in man,” was aware of the inveterate malice which instigated their enquiry ; and, in language which liberated him from the effect of their foul attempt, he at once defeats the insidious stratagem, and fixes the obligation of obedience to that government under which it had pleased God to reduce them : “ Render to Cæsar “ the things that are Cæsar’s.”

To separate the manifest connection and dependance between the duties specified in the text, would destroy the spirit and design
of

of the precept; which was clearly advanced to silence doubt, and establish an eternal precedent.

My purpose in this discourse is to enlarge upon the relationship of these duties, by shewing that a wilful breach of the leading injunction is inconsistent with integrity and gratitude; the ready motives that stimulate every upright and religious mind to glorify the Almighty in all his works.

The order of the text determines this for the first division of the subject.

Secondly, I shall enforce the vast importance of the conclusive precept, by dwelling upon some material points of general failure respecting the honour due to God in his merciful dispensations. And,

Thirdly, I shall conclude with an humble and affectionate address, by way of exhortation and encouragement in the grand cause.

I feel thoroughly impressed, that it might more become, and profit me likewise, to sit an attentive hearer, instead of apparently dictating in an assembly of so many learned and venerable brethren, whose experience,

ability, and attainments, far exceed my poor pretensions, and demand the utmost respect and deference. But my humble and bounden submission to the inclination of my superior, will, I trust, remove every suspicion of a presuming desire to fill this place ; and relying on the former candour of my audience, I hope a reasonable exertion in the cause of our common calling will cover the ill effect of many conspicuous deficiencies.

If we consider ourselves as a people that have received excess of favour from Providence, the subject affords a large field, both of grateful praise, and self-condemnation.

By reverting, for an instant only, to the sudden blessing of peace, from the destructive prospect of united contest, and the almost insuperable difficulties we had to combat (which were sapping the very vitals of the nation), we must candidly confess, no immediate reform of manners, much less any considerable or adequate effects of amendment, mark a grateful return for such singular deliverance.

If we contemplate the gracious success that has been vouchsafed to the wise and arduous

arduous exertions of government, to recruit the exhausted finances of the kingdom, which continue daily to exceed the most sanguine expectation, and (unless our delinquencies retard the progress) must assure the most valuable effects; how, under any influence of grateful sentiment, can we withhold the sacrifice of praise? If a character can be found in whom intuitive and acquired knowledge are combined in the most eminent degree, and virtue in union with ability, surely no one will presume to question the benefits such a distinction is calculated to produce, in *assisting* to conduct the formidable labours of the state. If we advert to the value of *true disinterestedness*, that rare quality in elevated stations, which transmits in such bright colours the honest fame of the renowned patriots of Sparta and of Athens; and on which alone the august fabric of reformation can proceed, or hope success; we may justly praise the Supreme Director of all events, who thus appropriates the means to his particular purposes, and the seasons of promoting them.

I am not insensible, however, what the

most *distant appearance* of * compliment (from this place) may suggest to uncharitable judgment, and that it cannot be kept too pure from subjects of that tendency: but as † God is the *giver of every good gift*, it exceeds my skill to separate the excellence of the instrument from the value of the work, unless we consider man as a mere machine, neither to be commended for a profitable exertion of the talents committed to his care, nor accountable for misapplying them. God's providence, in this, as in every other valuable means he suffers to take place, equally exacts religious praise: and should the purest sentiments suffer by my *mode* of expression, I take refuge under the consciousness of SINCERITY and TRUTH. We cannot sufficiently exalt God's goodness in providing rulers to his people, whose hearty inclination, and vigorous measures, assure the cheering prospect of peace and happiness.

* ——— incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.

HOR.

† He that praises the instruments of good, praises God, who hath given such gifts to men, says the biographer of one of the brightest ornaments of our church—the learned Hooker.

Hom.

I

Is

Is it not to their vigilant, active, and spirited proceedings, we are further indebted (under Heaven) to an escape from recent calamitous embroilment, which threatened a storm of serious consequence, but is now happily subsided in a blessed calm?

The efficacious returns of well-calculated œconomy hold out the substantial hope of future ease to the subject, and a sure and provident fund in case of sudden exigence, either to protect the kingdom, or check the insults of foreign power.

Surely these are blessings that demand a return of pious gratitude; let general observation determine the degree of it amongst us! It is to be feared this subject is seldom canvassed equitably; people rarely regulate their conduct by *religious principle*. They ascribe no proportionate glory to the Lord for these manifold and great blessings, or they would shew it in their ways: private interest is often so deeply rooted, that it absorbs every other consideration, and makes equal havoc with reason and justice. Could we investigate the charge minutely, the many examples of wilful obstruction to the expedients meditated for the public

good might justify severe reproach. People are often so blinded by the desire of immediate wealth, that they will not weigh this duty conscientiously; they do not reflect upon the injustice of accusing the rulers of failure in their projections, while their evasive prevention helps to render them abortive: they most erroneously suppose it no robbery to defraud the common purse; though doubtless, in the eye of God, it is as much so as the detention of any right whatsoever. The apostle confirms it in the plainest terms: (Rom. chap. vii. ver. 17) "Render therefore to all their dues; "tribute to whom tribute," &c. And the words of the text establish the same precept: "Render to Cæsar the things that "are Cæsar's, and unto God the things "that are God's." The crime of infringing this command is complicate; first, as a breach of the sacred laws themselves: secondly, in countenancing unjust and prejudicial objections against those we are taught to obey: (Rom. chap. xiii. ver. 1) "Let every soul be subject unto the higher "powers, for the powers that be are ordained of God") and thus opening a
 door

door to discontent, strife, and confusion. But, above all, it is offensive to Almighty God, as every deficiency of this kind is a perverse resistance of those second causes appointed by him to advance the welfare of any people.

But further : Many may not be aware, that, in thus neglecting the part of faithful subjects, they relinquish the title of honest men ; and that they are not only accountable for this personal trespass, but become primarily accessory to the transgression of others through the influence of bad example ; as also to the support of the most disgraceful description of men : for, as in every species of fraud, there could be little encouragement, if none were forward to receive the unlawful gain ; so, were conscientious regard invariably paid to civil duties, the trade of the informer would have little practice : and the folly is no less obvious than the crime ; for it should be well considered, and thankfully admitted, that in the sense of “ rendering to Cæsar the things that are “ Cæsar’s,” in our happy form of government, we essentially constitute this Cæsar in ourselves : we are prudently assisting to

secure a quiet and respectable existence in the scale of political power, and intestine comforts of the most agreeable complexion, at the same time; or, in the true sense in which the title of Cæsar may be *personally* applied in our constitution, a becoming portion of our joint services are indisputably, are highly due to a prince, who (in the detail of blessings for which we are indebted to Providence) stands foremost amongst the greatest we enjoy—a father to his people, in the most valuable and extensive sense.

We do not contribute to qualify the sinful and extravagant pleasures of a tyrannical oppressor; of *such* a Cæsar as lorded it over the Jews, when our blessed Saviour delivered the lesson in the text; nor is violence used to raise a secret fund that might endanger the liberties of the people under him: but general levies are voted by free consent, to support the dignity of hereditary right; of a king superlatively distinguished by the most amiable and religious virtues, whose compassionate regards, and soothing justice, extend to the most distant climes, to the wrongs of ASIA, and who
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well deserves to be ranked among those few humane Cæsars, whose admired worth hath derived to them such just and immortal fame. Thus, in the enumeration of our political blessings, and the too insensible reception of them, I have adduced both reason and religion to support this axiom; that a person who is blind to the duties of his public relationship cannot possibly lay claim to an honest endeavour after *Christian perfection*, which implies a faithful discharge of *every obligation* to the best of our power.

I shall open the subject of my second proposition with this striking denunciation from God himself, by his holy prophet, to his once favoured people: (Deut. chap. viii. ver. 20)
 “ As the nations which the Lord destroy-
 “ eth before your face, so shall ye perish,
 “ because ye would not be obedient to the
 “ voice of the Lord your God.”

I humbly presume the following may be no unnatural paraphrase upon these words:
 ‘ Notwithstanding all the various mercies
 ‘ long continued, and still lavishing upon
 ‘ you, unless ye cast out the hateful thing
 ‘ (ingratitude) from amongst you, by turn-
 ‘ ing

'ing from the error of your ways, and
 ' worshipping me in pure holiness, ye shall
 ' all likewise perish. I am now closing the
 ' long trial of my forbearance and pity,
 ' which I have exhibited to *prove* you, that
 ' if even indulgence and prosperity do not
 ' touch your heart, and incline you to
 ' grateful reformation, the measure of your
 ' sins may be made up, and my just fury
 ' poured out upon such a people; that *I*
 ' *may condemn you out of your own mouth.*'

The aid of declamation is totally superfluous to illustrate our character as a sinful nation; universal example speaks the fatal truth. I have selected two particulars for the present discussion, each of powerful influence in establishing our guilt, and retarding the recovery of pure and profitable religion, viz. SCHISM and LUKEWARMNESS.

I am aware, that what I have to offer on the *first* of these articles may attract reproach from a particular class of people, amongst whom, doubtless, are some well meaning, pious servants of our common Lord, who yet harbour a zeal without knowledge in this particular: but, in my present capacity, the impulse of duty must be obeyed;

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it is sufficient to my own feelings, that in what I shall observe I am governed by the purest good-will to all who have been deluded and estranged from the salutary form of worship in which they were born and bred, by a false notion of becoming better Christians than "those who keep the law." I have judged the topic pertinent, as the place is populous, the error prevalent, and a number of young disciples here assembled, who, on so particular an occasion, may need a word of *caution*.

I presume not to meddle with prejudices and opinions instilled from infancy, or any mode of worship permitted by the glorious privileges of freedom and charitable toleration; I mean simply, by exhorting against the heinous sin of schism, to use my humble endeavours towards convincing and reforming any one who may ignorantly suppose it an article of little import.

This word signifies (a breaking off, or division) separating from the society of the church without any reasonable cause: whereas the apostle "charges the Corinthians to live in unity together, that there be no divisions or schisms among them;"
for

for even so early men began to have itching ears, and to attach themselves from preference to *teachers*, more than *doctrine*: and it is evident Saint Paul foresaw the latent mischief, when he further condemns those who should say, “ I am of Paul, and I of “ Apollos; and I of Cephas, and I of “ Christ;” for Christ could not be divided. They all preached the same saving faith; and we see it was held unlawful and injurious to the state of the church to desert one teacher and to follow another, though even equally regular. Now if this conduct was reprobated by the apostles respecting the above eminent names, the argument must be much stronger against following any self-created professors whatsoever, and forsaking a decent, regular, and legal form of worship under duly appointed ministers. Indeed these very persons should be put in mind to subject themselves to the higher powers, for they cannot be ignorant what is threatened in 1 Cor. chap. xiii. ver. 2, “ to those who resist the powers ordained “ of God.” Now an establishment that owes its birth to as wonderful an interference of Providence, as perhaps any event can

can furnish since the days of our Saviour, must be esteemed (in the apostle's sense) *as a government ordained of God*; a church that testifies as pure and merciful reclaim from the grossest errors that ever darkened reason, or combined against men's civil and religious liberties, must be ranked by the wise and good amongst the choicest gifts of heaven: persons not content with serving God in *such* a society, must be dead to all sense of solemn worship, to all the benefits of peace and regularity, before they can be persuaded to forsake it.

It is a sin of so pernicious consequence, that the church prays positively against it; and, I own, I cannot see with what face or conscience any one can occasionally join in that *necessary* petition to Almighty God, who, in the general tenor of their practice, are so inconsistently instrumental to the increase of the fault.

Besides the aggravation of this crime, in that it prejudices by licentious example, and the indefensible violation of the most wholesome laws, such persons exclude themselves from numerous advantages that cannot possibly be obtained in private conventicles,

ticles, under a change of teachers of such various and strange description: they must be reduced to prefer a mutilated service, or one of bold innovation, to the purest, perhaps, that was ever instituted; selected from the source of unpolluted scripture; its composition so judicious, affecting, and instructive, as to touch and raise the heart with grateful fervour to the object of its devotion; and perfectly answering to the apostle's rule of "every thing being done decently and in order." And as to the tenets of the church, if salvation cannot be obtained within their influence, where shall we seek it?

According to the original commission of Christ himself, the preaching and expounding this doctrine is deputed to an order of men, whose office is peculiarly sanctified; and surely it is an incumbent demonstration of respect to the Deity, to signalize his service by every external mark of honour, even though the sanction of the apostles did not support it: but we have their authority for the several orders we retain in the church, particularly expressed and settled in many passages of their writings. Nay, we
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may observe the regard God himself declared for a separated and dignified order to minister before him; it being objected to one of the wicked kings of Israel, that, amongst the greatest of his offences, "he made priests of the lowest of the people:" and though, most assuredly, they whom many look up to as "teachers sent from God," are of the *very* lowest of the people, and they can shew no test or sanction for the office they assume, yet have they every deference paid them, to the utter confusion and subversion of all due respect to the sacred office. Again, by exceeding the privilege of law in frequenting confused assemblies, the holy names of God and Christ are often dishonoured and blasphemed by the prophane; it adds to the sinful scoffing of the profligate; and, I fear, it is no uncommon sacrifice to the spleen and prejudice of the ignorant multitude, to depreciate and condemn the regular clergy, and thus raise a polluted foundation of superior excellence. "Filthy dreamers, who are not afraid to speak evil against dignities; whereas the angel did not dare to bring railing accusation against the Devil" (Jude,

(Jude, ver. 8). In short, if people will not be convinced by the joint dictates of good sense and scripture, that they may serve their Maker as acceptably and effectually in the “place where he has set his name,” and where their pious services are secured from every indecent interruption, it must be placed to unhappy weakness and ignorance, or wilful obstinacy; and till some judicious and efficacious means are used to check this evil, it must continue to gain ground, and the attendance upon the regular form of divine worship will gradually decline.

I would beg your patience for a few more arguments on this subject, which I have endeavoured to make level to the apprehension of the lowest capacity. If it is asserted by any zealous person, that good may be proved to have followed such irregular instructors; I reply, that though it is possible for God to bring good out of evil, the maxim of scripture forbids us to *do evil that good may come of it*. Now, if an ignorant, idle person observes any reputed good man to be totally regardless of attending his parish church, he must naturally

rally conclude coming to church an indifferent thing; whereas we are commanded to do nothing, though even lawful in ourselves, that "may cause a weaker brother to offend." All scripture must be interpreted concordantly: they who wilfully break one commandment, are guilty of the whole law. Let people labour for perfection continually; but let them be consistent; for nothing is more idle or absurd, than to exhort those to go on to perfection, who are dead to the principles of morality and obedience, who have not laid the first stone of the foundation. Can it reasonably be supposed, that God will deny those helps in the church, which it is pretended he so abundantly affords to such as oppose all order, as have no authority but self-persuasion? There must be order in heaven, because it is one requisite to the beauty of good government; whatever encourages irregularity, disputes the value of positive institutions; unerring wisdom can never approve things opposite in their nature. No king ever delegates an ambassador, without outward credentials, as well as inward ability: shall the ministers of God want less

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sanction than the ministers of men? What commission can most of these itinerant preachers produce, beyond the warrant of deluded fancy, and presumptuous conceit? Should it be advanced, in defence of such self-election, that our Saviour delivered nothing expressly on the subject of an established ministry, this plea for acting disorderly is not well founded; for our blessed Saviour did positively nominate and appoint first the *twelve*, and then the *seventy*: they were regularly called, they did not depute *themselves*; and for their commission they bore that sign which could *alone* avail in the infancy of Christianity, *an extraordinary assistance of the Spirit*: and if the very first expounders of the gospel were publicly ordained, even when miracles alone must have afforded abundant warrant, it is very singular, now they are ceased, that an outward call and regular appointment should diminish in its value.

If an invidious objection is alleged against the remissness or insufficiency of some individuals, does not our Saviour's assertion, that one he had called was a devil, imply argument of submission to the office (in such

such a case), for *the ordinance sake*; and likewise evince, that they who are most duly called, may hazard the reward of their lawful station, by yielding to the temptations of the world? Christ's ordination of the apostles, then, was typical of the future establishment they afterwards adopted, and may be traced in an uninterrupted succession, till heresy and error crept in, and disturbed the order of the church.

The testimony of miraculous power lasted no longer than the primitive church was settled; it is now plainly done away, "faith being the evidence of things not seen." Its peculiar work effected, the use of human instruction, under regular government, succeeded, and only the ordinary gifts of the Spirit remained.

And to those who pretend a scarcity of spiritual food within the pale of that church in which they were born and educated, let any man ask his own heart whether he was as good, when he first turned his back upon his own church, as he might have been had he followed what he heard there: if he was, there could be no necessity for desertion, because it proves that an ample

store of improvement was at hand. If *not*, he condemns himself, and cannot complain of wanting the means of grace. Again, the word of God is open to all: how better can the intervals of the Lord's day be spent, than "to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" what is contained therein, and compare it with what you hear at church? Can any of you devise more natural or profitable employment than the instruction of your families and children? If you cannot teach them yourselves, that objection is now in many places removed by the successful progress of the Sunday Schools: you may compel their attendance on the instruction thus afforded them; and where there are none, you may converse with them at home, and give them wholesome lessons of modesty, temperance, and humble resignation to your lot in life: what in a fuller sense is obeying God's law, or rendering him pleasing service? And will any one dare affirm, if they ask God's aid in church, that he will be less gracious to their petition than if they make it in barns or fields? On the contrary, while people absent themselves, and are running from
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one unlicensed preaching to another, the unsettled example affords children early and unfair prejudice against the established church, or exposes them to the wicked habit of profaning the Sabbath.—That relative duties are of the *utmost import* to the Christian character, appears from the apostle's assertion, "that they who are wanting in this respect are worse than infidels." Now they who leave their children to the hazard of evil habit, are certainly wanting in this respect, and in the highest degree; therefore they can have no claim to the character of real Christians, though it were possible to attend every meeting in the county in one day. But what is the use of attending God's service any where? Is it not to impress the necessity of acting wisely and uprightly? "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only!" My friends, if you fall short of this, the others are very unsubstantial proofs of zeal to God. "The *true marks* of our having the holy Spirit (says a sound divine), and distinguishing its suggestions from our own vain imaginations, are its checks to spiritual pride, self-conceit, and disobedience

“ to government, in church and state;
 “ making us endeavour to keep the unity
 “ of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Schism, then, is a dangerous sin, big with the same offence at this present day as in the more early ages of the church, in that it militates with the order established by Divine Providence; and, if not checked in time, we may justly fear will finally provoke God to *remove the candlestick from us*, as he has done from other nations.

Many likewise are guilty of contempt of God's laws, who refrain from the public worship of their Maker from *other* causes not less exceptionable. If any such are here, let them weigh the spirit of this text: “Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be “a sign between me and you.” The command is express, the consequence most gracious. How that sign is perverted by the unhallowed practice of our times, irreverent custom speaks too powerfully; what the end may be should alarm us! God will surely visit for these things. The expediency of religious reform in this solemn article, appears from the pious efforts of our most gracious Sovereign in his late admonitory

nitary proclamation: but, alas! the low mark of popular conviction is not propitious to success; a more hopeful prospect of returning veneration to this commandment would have appeared, if, when a question * relative thereto was lately agitated, the test of pious sentiment had marked a large majority in its favour, instead of a Christian motion being lost in a Christian senate.

As I feel that I am highly indebted to your patience already, I shall close this head with the words of the most learned among the schismatics themselves; who eloquently styles this sin, 'the mother of Confusion, the nurse of Atheism, the inlet to Popery, and the most fruitful source of all errors and heresies.'

Having thus far contributed my humble mite towards upholding the honour of the Great Jehovah, in the service of his Messiah; recommending unity and gratitude for the mercies we enjoy both in church and state; and principally by exalting the

* The debate alluded to was on an attempt to recover the veneration due to the Sabbath-day by some public regulations.

praise and worship due unto his holy name, as the only sure basis of all true happiness, public and private, temporal and eternal; I have only to add a brief word upon *lukewarmness*, an article of highest disgust to the Almighty, and with which I shall conclude.

It carries its own evidence, that barely attending God's house, without we *worship him in spirit and in truth*, unless we bring him acceptable sacrifice, will produce no favour. The Almighty proposes his own glory as the ultimate object of devotion. He could have no design in creation, greater than to extend the knowledge of his wisdom, power, and goodness. The promulgation of these, by a race of humble, grateful creatures, most beautifully fills up the measure of their duty, and constitutes their *greatest happiness* here, and hereafter, whether taken in the capacity of men or angels; the hatefulness and bad effects of a divided heart towards so good a Being cannot be inculcated *too deeply*. The particular denunciation of the Almighty to St. John, against the churches who had relaxed in the warmth of their first profession, is well known,

known, and truly fearful; and it requires the extremest ardour in the clerical character to rouse men from this fatal lethargy in religious exercises.

In discharge of this urgent duty, even the most obscurely situated of this profession have a proportionate task of vigorous exertion to perform in the declining, but holy cause of their blessed Master; for the disease is spreading. A great portion of this needful care falls necessarily on those whose lot confines them to a constant attendance on their office: many of this respectable class of our fraternity may possibly conceive their fate rather hardly limited, when they measure their appointment by a comparative standard, and the intruding wishes of frail nature are attracted by the charms of worldly splendour. But let none undervalue themselves from the circumstance of *subordinate condition*: there is no species of fame the human mind can deservedly emulate, but what alike presents itself to the most humble order of our calling; affords the amplest range for talents, learning, and application, abundant exercise for courage and magnanimity, a field
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of noblest ambition—the thirst of doing good ; and where some of these are less required, from particular situations, the religious character is sublimated by the industrious cultivation of every Christian virtue, PATIENCE, HUMILITY, and RESIGNATION: and though, in the present state of things, modesty and merit may seem to languish for want of recompence, yet let us not faint, my brethren ; we shall have a reward if *we persevere in well-doing*. The ways of Providence are inscrutable : the chain is too infinite for mortals to decide, why their purest endeavours do not always meet a favourable event. It is great consolation, at the worst, that we so far tread in our Master's steps. If we cultivate the lessons dictated by our station, we shall share with him in the honour he obtained *through suffering* : and though we are not forbidden to aim at serving him in more conspicuous rank, even *here*, yet we must wait God's good time, and submit to trials, under assurance they are dispensed in wisdom for our good. Let no terms of reproach (the weapons of the weak or profligate) disarm us in a steady warfare ; but rather glory that

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your light so shines as to attract the regard of them who walk in darkness.

And of that description of the order, to whom God's providence hath dispensed a larger share of temporal favour, whether for trial or for blessing, how amiable, how useful, is *their* character, who receive the bounty as they ought; who dedicate of their good things to him who gave them! What portrait of human excellence can rival the faithful, humble, hospitable pastor? The voice of gratitude extols his name in the report of the industrious, needy man. By relieving the sick and disqualified for labour, instructing the young, reproofing the profane, and encouraging the sober humble Christian, the father and friend shine equally in the pastor of the flock.

In the close of this address, I most humbly beg leave to intimate, that diligence in the exercise of our office is absolutely required to render every other attainment useful. Neither brilliant talents, the profoundest learning, or distinguished posts, will finally profit us without it.

And I shall retire with most grateful praise to him, to whom alone all praise is due,

due, if I can impress any present, or myself, with a permanent, fruitful sense of these few scriptural remembrancers.

As matter of encouragement to perseverance, let us all consider the high honour conferred upon us even here, in being in a degree the instruments of disseminating the glory of God, the true end of all religion: this should chiefly attach our labours. In addition, let us attend to the hope of the promised reward, in that comprehensive welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

As a check to indifference on our part, whenever the wiles of the tempter combine with frail nature to slacken our vigilance, and expose us to the danger of being unprofitable, let us call to mind the awakening, the awful summons of the defrauded Judge, *Give an account of thy stewardship!* How fearfully do the riches, the power, the advantages intrusted to us appear, with this inseparable appendage of an account to be delivered! But let none despond: let the prosperous rather exceed in grateful exultation. In our father's house are many mansions: the brightest crowns are reserved for those

those who shall well employ the choicest gifts. The Judge appropriates rewards in equity and wisdom: let us only beware, *not to hide our talent in the earth; let us set our affections on things above.* And to the ineffable consolation of the lowest of God's faithful servants, only reflect who is to be the Judge—"the Lamb of God, slain for "the sins of the world;" who hath graciously declared, for the support and comfort of all who strive to follow his example, that "the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, "the mourner," and even "the persecuted," shall not fall short of glory, for they are already blessed; for *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven.

May we all finally meet in those regions of unfading bliss, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, who is gone to prepare a place for all those who love his appearing.

Now to God, &c.

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grants. The Judge appropriates rewards in
equity and wisdom: let us only beware
not to hide our talent in the earth; let us let
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Now to God, etc.

S E R M O N VIII.

*Upon the expediency and utility of Sunday
Schools.*

Fit ex his consuetudo, deinde natura.

QUINT.

S E R M O N .

Upon the expediency and utility of Sunday



The ex libris of the British Museum.

Quint.

S E R M O N VIII.

JOHN, chap. xxi. ver. 15.
*Jesus saith unto Simon Peter, Simon, son of
Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?
He saith unto him, Yea Lord; thou
knowest that I love thee. He saith unto
him, Feed my lambs.*

THE whole history of our blessed
Lord, as contained in the writings
of the four Evangelists, is delivered in that
form of instruction, which we call allegory,
allusion, or parable; a manner in general
use among the Eastern nations, and well
calculated to fix the attention of the lower
orders of men, as being adapted to the com-
prehension of the plainest capacity. Our
Saviour naturally employed the mode of
teaching then in use, and took advantage,
from its familiarity and facility of style, to
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instil and propagate the sublimest doctrines, and most essential truths, that were ever taught or received by men. During the whole course of his ministry, our blessed Master describes his own office, under the figure of a *shepherd*, as he was represented indeed in the language of the ancient prophets; and his disciples and followers he distinguishes by the appellation of his *flock*. In the injunction in the text he seems, under the same character of the chief pastor, to continue this figurative mode of speaking, as applicable to his immediate purpose, but with an additional division of his disciples into two distinct classes, which he plainly particularizes by his *sheep* and his *lambs*; from whence we may fairly infer, that he meant to exhort an equal diligence towards the younger part of those converts who were capable of the earliest initiation into his religion, as towards those more adult persons, who had enlisted themselves into the Christian warfare. *Teach my lambs*, in contradistinction to *teach my sheep*, can mean nothing less than a command to his faithful apostle, to pay all due attention to the cultivation of that tender part of the flock, whose

whose innocence and natural levity required all possible caution and improvement. As I think we may, without any violence or presumption, receive the precept in the text in this sense, it is my design to apply the spirit of it in the following discourse, to establish and defend the essential benefits flowing from the excellent institution of SUNDAY SCHOOLS, wheresoever they can be founded: and particularly to recommend and encourage our own perseverance in this laudable endeavour towards forwarding the salvation of that part of the community to which we belong, by watching over their morals, checking the sad influence of evil habits, and supplying them with early principles of religion and virtue.

In treating this subject, I shall *first* insist upon the necessity, benefits, and duty of this undertaking; *secondly*, I shall take notice of some idle objections that have been made to it by unbelieving and selfish persons; and *thirdly*, I shall instance a sad and singular proof of the rank remains of ingratitude and infidelity among us, and proceed to combat some false and unsettled

notions concerning the influence of God's providence in the happy event which at this very time so nearly concerns us; and from this circumstance I shall demonstrate the necessity of cultivating betimes such a foundation of Christian knowledge, as may tend to prevent and defeat every irreligious system.

It is observable, that the plain question our Saviour puts to his apostle in the text is repeated *thrice*; doubtless with a design to enforce the value of the precept it contains: *Lovest thou me?* And the test he requires beyond the positive assertion of the apostle in the affirmative, is equally powerful to recommend the duty before us: *Feed my lambs.* Or, in other words, “ if
 “ you would convince me hereafter of the
 “ *sincerity* of this profession of loving me,
 “ shew it by taking all possible care of those
 “ that are growing up, whose years and
 “ situation expose them to more than ordinary danger and temptation, and require of course proportionable attention,
 “ exhortation, and instruction.” Here then we have a positive command, prompting us to the discharge of our best exertions for
 the

the moral advancement of youth in *general*; and vindicating every wise measure and invention for that good purpose: but the necessity is likewise urgent from the sad condition of numerous individuals themselves, the welfare of the community, and a regard to our best interests.

It must seriously affect any one who pays due respect to religious duties, and the happiness of his fellow-creatures, to observe so many forlorn children, whose parents and kindred are unqualified to instruct them in the first principles of the Christian faith and practice, exposed to all the dangers that idleness and ignorance do naturally subject them. Some measure surely is expedient to remove this misfortune, and the humane attention of many considerate Christians to the valuable institution in question, seems most happily calculated to produce the reform. No device could more effectually assist to stem the torrent of immorality which pervades the kingdom, and through which the lives and liberties of thousands of its people fall an untimely sacrifice to penal law: in the prevention of which evil, an accession of good accrues to society

at large ; since a diminished populace, or a vicious one, must finally involve it in complicated ruin. But the grand object we should have in view is the honour of God ; a regard to which will ever assure the happiness and prosperity of the creature. The universal and increasing contempt of divine worship, by unrestrained youth, in most populous places, has for some time excited the abhorrence of the religious and charitable, and animated their zeal to attempt a remedy, which, from general consent and practice, we may humbly trust will produce the most happy effects. Indeed we may venture to pronounce, that so valuable a mark of veneration to God's name, and holy day, affords a blessed prospect that religion's sacred flame will yet revive and flourish in the land. Nor is it presuming to suppose, that the pious endeavours of those who cherish these good designs, have staid the arm of vengeance, which the crying sins of a prosperous but ungrateful people daily provoke : it is a most pleasing and powerful proof, added to the daily and astonishing mercies we receive from heaven, that God is still with us.

That there are some so blind, that they cannot see the mighty advantages derived from such establishments; and others so perverse, as even to discourage and oppose them, is in *itself* the strongest argument of the necessity we maintain for every possible check to ignorance and licentiousness; but to these points I shall speak in due time: at present I shall dwell a little longer upon what more nearly concerns the first division of my subject; nor will it be easily denied, but that what relates to both public and private good, must become the duty and interest of every member of society to promote, according to his ability.

Now, when through God's grace and goodness the mind of man discovers any inclination to the pursuits of virtue, it is matter of wisdom to adopt such means, and advance such arguments, as are most likely to forward the design; for the very best plans will fail in practice, if not supported by certain natural aids, which are positively essential to their success. In the case before us, little permanent good can be expected, unless that authority is exerted when occasion requires, which God

and nature assign to particular relations, as *parents, masters and mistresses, and magistrates*. My chief address therefore, at present, will be to the *first* of these ; and I would bespeak your attention, from an assurance that whatever I offer proceeds from the most affectionate wish for the mutual good of yourselves and children ; and I hope I shall be able to convince you, how much it is your duty to use your most diligent endeavours to help the promotion of so useful an undertaking.

Common sense, no less than Christian charity, lead me to hope, that the present and future welfare of those *most dear to you*, both in this life and the next, should form your *first* and most tender wish. If your children turn out *wild and wicked*, it must affect *you* as well as *them* in the sorest degree ; and that they so often *do* involve their parents in trouble and sorrow, is certainly wholly owing to their being brought up in ignorance of their duty to God, their neighbour, and themselves : what assists in any degree, therefore, in easing your duty towards them, and defeating this mischief, must indisputably be granted useful and necessary ;

cessary; and it seems reasonable to suppose, that the means employed to *remove* the sad consequence of neglect and ignorance, should fill the parent with the truest satisfaction; and, as they have, or ought to have, the greatest influence over their offspring, that they should employ their natural power to forward the good effect of every exertion for their happiness.

How is it then that we observe so different and unnatural a conduct in *some*, to the great reproach of every thing that is truly amiable in human nature? Why, with deep concern, it must be placed to the only obvious cause, that such persons have no proper sense of the value of these blessings *themselves*; their understanding is blunted by ignorance and long neglect; they have never been *taught*, and how should they *know*? They have no *faith*, and consequently no *hope*; and therefore they are in a manner *dead*, or indifferent to every *means* of grace, and the sure and dreadful consequence of a life of sin and ignorance, and of the end for which they were created. It is the more expedient, therefore, to be urgent in godly admonitions to awake
themselves,

themselves, and use their diligence that their children be better instructed, it being obvious, that from such advantages the rising generation will gain more light, and encourage again in *their* progeny what they have experienced so serviceable to *themselves*. From all which it is clear, that much good may be derived, both to individuals and the community, by early and pious care; and that it is an indispensable duty in all superior relations to accept such means of good to all under their care and jurisdiction, and to enforce the application of them by every possible argument and influence: and as what concerns the natural parent is equally binding upon the civil parent, the *master* and *magistrate*, what has been already advanced will be sufficient for both.

Let us now attend to a few more general arguments to evince the blessing of this establishment. A portion of weakness and depravity must be more or less observed in the lives of all men; but all are not equally qualified to distinguish the pervading effect of this natural deficiency, or have they leisure or inclination to attend to its share of influence in their seemingly
best

best actions. Institutions then, that are calculated to lay the ground-work of moral conduct, and to point out the latent source of all evil, must be productive of the happiest effects.

Besides, as a further inducement to profit as much as possible, we should consider life itself as uncertain : " In the midst of life we are in death." God will not be mocked for ever ; our great enemy is powerful and subtle ; *wilful* sinners have no possible right or reason to expect any *extraordinary* methods of Providence to reclaim them. To slight the early and valuable means of learning their duty to him, must be highly sinful and dangerous : perhaps one of the best marks of a sincere repentance for past sins, and the only personal amends to be made, will be the earnest attention to save your children from the evils that might have been avoided by a virtuous education. God, in mercy, hath dispensed in this land the ordinary and sound means of obtaining his grace to help in time of need ; and by putting it into the hearts of his servants to institute the more particular mode I am now recommending, he binds all
that

that are concerned therein to a double tie of duty and gratitude ; for, depend upon it, no method is so substantial, safe, and likely to succeed in preserving men from the sad consequences of incurring habits of vice and profligacy, as learning betimes the relation they stand in to God, and how to obtain the divine favour.

Sad will be the case of all those who madly and profanely trust, that, after passing their whole lives in sin and ignorance, and a wilful perverseness to reform and be instructed, they may at last be reclaimed and pardoned by some *extraordinary* intervention of partial mercy : this is a presumption of a most dangerous and horrid cast, totally repugnant to all that Christ taught and commanded, in the view of promoting his kingdom of righteousness : for with what sense or security can you expect miracles in your own or your children's favour, whilst you obstinately continue, during a long course of time, to despise the *easy* and *regular* means he hath ordained for your good ? In truth, to reclaim a hardened sinner is among the *greatest of miracles* ; it being, as God himself most forcibly paints
it

it in the words of his prophet (and in order to deter men from proceeding to such dreadful extremities), as soon to be expected as to wash the Ethiopian white, or for the leopard to change his spots. We know that *there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*; but then it is of one who *bringeth forth fruits meet for repentance*, in the amendment of life: and though some few may be accepted that have wrought but *one hour* in God's vineyard, yet you have been warned a thousand times not to build on such presumptuous hope, unless you can say truly you were *never called sooner to work*. Therefore, my friends, let me beseech you not to prevent God's mercies towards your own children, who are now called to learn to improve their lives and serve their Maker, lest your condemnation at the last dread day of account be more severe than for your own single trespasses. God knows, if his pity towards many was no greater than that of their natural parents, in this article of watching over their religious and moral conduct, lamentable indeed would be their case. Cherish then the happy opportunity of closing with his
goodness

goodness in this provision he hath graciously appointed for you: nor can I forbear repeating to you, that heavy will be the sentence against all who wink at their children's neglect, from a *mistaken, wicked, and unkind* indulgence of their idle inclinations; against all who fail to send them to the place of general instruction on the Lord's day, or who withhold *correction* when (unknown to them) they stay away. Against all such their own children shall rise up in the day of judgment, and condemn them with unutterable upbraidings, because they were accessary in hindering them from profiting by the good will and Christian labours of those who, under Heaven, would have been instrumental to their best and eternal interests, by providing for their improvement, and seeing that they learnt their duty.

The necessity, benefit, and obligation of this undertaking having been plainly stated to you, I come now, secondly, to advert to some objections that have been raised against this most useful and pious establishment.

It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless most true, that on one hand, even
among

among some who would wish to pass for the *most* godly, unfavourable surmises and vague doubts have been suggested as to the *purity* of any effect from such exertions: whether they might not tend to exalt the creature in his *own esteem*, and give too great consequence to *the works of the law*; or whether they might originate and proceed upon true gospel principles. Now, as to the *first* apprehension, Christ's kingdom, we know, must be composed of "a people *zealous of good works.*" If we are taught to avoid and dread the sins that pollute the world, we shall in time become this description of people. We are likewise told, that whatever we "do unto these *little ones*, is done unto Christ himself:" the good then that is done to his creatures and servants, and for the glory of his name, will certainly exalt our own; but it will be only in God's favour, and *not* in our own esteem. As to the *second* doubt, I shall only observe, that where the chief employment is to learn to read the gospel, and to imbibe its precepts, all such idle and conceited misgivings can only be upheld by disingenuous and invidious arguments;
and

and are so *trifling, absurd, and weak*, that I shall not vouchsafe them another moment's notice. But, on the other hand, the sober-minded Christian hath also sometimes taken the alarm, and entertained a fear (through honest zeal for our ecclesiastical establishment, which is highly commendable in all its members) lest this attempt at reformation of the multitude may have originated in the secret machinations of persons devoted to *innovation*; and from that suspicion rather set their faces against the work, fearing it might open a further door to *schism* and *enthusiasm*. But in this they have been much mistaken; for I will not hesitate to affirm, that nothing is more likely to check the progress of any injurious influence upon the established principles of our church, than to prevent the tender mind from *collecting prejudices*, by furnishing them sometimes with *sober precepts* of the law of God, as confirmed by Christ himself, and not abolished, in the gospel. It is the shameful abuse of this solemn day of rest, the long neglect to have it strictly honoured by the populace, that affords an opportunity, through whim and novelty, to frequent promiscuous

promiscuous conventicles, and furnishes a specious argument to all descriptions of innovators to increase their proselytes, and decry the value of our regular establishment, which they see so little attended and encouraged. It is this great crime which ever did of old, and doubtless still continues to draw down judgments, and, if not reformed, will prepare still more for every irreligious community. The Lord is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever : what he *once* commanded to be kept holy he can never wink at being profaned ; and if nothing but the *appearance* of awful respect to his law was to be gained by it, I am confident some hope of favour might be encouraged even by this beginning. But the prospect is more promising, as the design is deeper than mere *form* ; for by so considerate and pious a provision being made for the protection and improvement of the infant poor, such an abundance of good seed is sown, as must produce *some* early return, and much future increase.

We are told by a pious and exemplary * pre-

* See the Lord Bishop of London's Letter to his Clergy.

late of the present day, that not less than 300,000 children are every Sunday provided with the means of learning the important duties of that holy day, of getting an early habit of respecting it, and of course are prevented from falling into numberless dangers which the devil is busy to lay in the way of those who are off their guard, and which ignorance, idleness, and vicious company expose them to.

No one, if he will think but one moment, can avoid seeing the vast benefit flowing from such care of youth, and the general regard for the welfare of those so near to us. The single reflection, on the contrary part, of having so large a body of the populace, as above specified, remain in the greatest ignorance, and daily strengthened in every vicious practice, hath something in it so shocking and alarming, that it is of itself sufficient to convince us of the inestimable value of so saving a prevention from destruction. The cause needs no eloquence with the serious and upright: good men, of every description and persuasion, will yield to the powerful light of truth; though Satan, as has been shewn in the two last cases,

cases, is most subtle and industrious in undermining every virtuous project, and can occasionally counterfeit a bright form to cover his dark designs. But there are other objectors, and with unbelievers a different course of reasoning must be employed. With them it would be waste of time to insist upon arguments built upon Christian principles: they who deny the value of the foundation, cannot be expected to admire the superstructure. Yet among these there are men of liberal sentiments, warm friends to the force of sound reasoning, and professed advocates for the advantages of moral excellence, and the beauty of virtue. Men of this turn must be treated in their own way: when they dispute the utility of such an institution, we must desire them to revert to the history of all ages and empires; we must appeal to the test of political truth, whether most states have not declined in proportion to the excess of moral depravity, and whether the general defect of virtuous principle from that standard of perfection *admitted in their times* has not been obviously the forerunner of the public misfortune; and, on the contrary, whe-

ther the æra of their meridian lustre has not been most conspicuous when *purity of manners* has been the allowed characteristic of the *people*. This might be fully illustrated by examples, if time permitted ; and consequently the same care must be necessary at all times to restrain licentiousness, and instil the love of good.

These men will allow, that a labourer is by nature as well endowed as a nobleman as to intellectual capacity, and that instruction and reflection are the means that render it valuable ; and it is equally true, that the same reason why a lord may happen to be less exemplary and virtuous than his exalted station requires him to be, is chiefly owing to the deficiency of instilling early and virtuous principles in the mind : *both* characters are doubtless formed capable of improvement, and will in general act in life according to the precepts they have imbibed. But though they grant the expediency of education, they object to its being intrusted to the management of the *clergy* ; and this from a reason that can only spring from the rankest infidelity ; because, though they allow that the *moral* part

part of the Catechism will lay a good foundation for a virtuous life, yet they dread our endeavours of laying a still deeper foundation, the love and fear of God, and a belief in his holy will and word, which they term *superstition*. Now such disputers may be truly said not to *know* the Catechism, for every article of it being built on *scripture*, they cannot assent to its merit, as a valuable epitome of moral instruction, without subscribing to the truth of scripture, with which it is so closely connected, and by whose sanction every precept it contains is recommended. But if the clergy are improper persons for the inspection of this work, to whom would they commit it? The parents in general are totally unqualified; few masters or mistresses will submit to the drudgery; superiors in rank will hardly stoop to it, nor are they constantly resident to give uniform attendance, was the confinement eligible to them: so that, unless the most insufficient, unfair, and illiberal reasons be admitted, none can be more proper to direct these institutions than the minister of the parish, who can have no possible interest or gratification to compensate for his pains, but the call of *humanity*, and *obedi-*

ence to his *Master's will*. In further defence then of the clerical superintendence of these matters, as I am now addressing Christians and not infidels, I may return with propriety to Christian arguments.

The text alone affords us an undeniable injunction—*Feed my lambs*: and the original commission to the apostles, *that they should go and teach all nations*, determines both their authority and peculiar qualification for this work; and will certainly extend to, and include, every kind of inspection, wherein the principles of their profession have any share. We may at the same time deduce, from the language of our blessed Master, that religion and morality are to be taught like other things, and not to be expected to appear or flourish, if not duly planted and cultivated. Now as nothing can be so well attained as in the season of youth, because all impressions are then more easily made and lasting; so the rudiments of religion, and the obligation to moral duties, can at no other period be more properly, or so effectually inculcated. As a Christian flock, therefore, we must listen to the voice of the chief pastor; and for this end he hath left us his gospel, containing proper food of all kinds;

kinds; for this end he hath appointed and continued to us a standing ministry, whose office it is to exhort to *every* good work, and, as far as they are able, to assist and attend to its progress. And in respect to this *particular* good work before us, every rational means concurs with the blessed grace and promise of the Almighty to produce the desired effect.

Habit is second nature; and it requires but a moderate share of understanding (where the will is not perverted) to determine, that not only to be kept from the infection of vice, but at the same time to acquire the genuine precepts of religion and morality, which are so little known and practised among the lower orders of men, is a *double* blessing, which none but the profane and despisers of all sacred institutes will dispute.

To what can we attribute the shocking conduct of many of the *poorer* of our brethren, nay, in sad truth, of the more exalted in society, but to the want of wholesome circumspection to their ways in their juvenile years, when they should have been trained in habits of virtue, which

would have prevented them from the indefensible and ruinous practices to which their unbridled passions lead them, and which, in too many, from want of a better restraint, are only moderated by fear of legal punishment? We must all be sensible how *much* we need a reformation in this *our* little community; and never was there a more *politic*, *happy*, and *holy* method devised, to check and hinder all unlawful courses, and to bring a blessing upon every place where the business is *seriously* conducted, than that which the employment of the Sunday Schools is calculated to produce.

Without some knowledge of godliness, youth will gradually advance in the road to ruin. Early practice is as salutary in a good course, as pernicious in an evil one; and the further blessing attending early admonition and improvement, is evident from the case of those who have unhappily been without it. How many are there who scarce know there is a God who made and preserves them, at least any thing of his relationship to them as an heavenly Father; and the still more elevated degree they might attain to hereafter through his
grace

grace, and humble obedience to his laws whilst *here*! And if they *know* him not, how shall they *believe* in him? for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*.

In short, the fear of God is the most certain principle to form dutiful children, good subjects, and useful members of society; and the advantage of knowing the contents and meaning of the holy scriptures *from a child, which are able to make wise unto salvation, through the faith which is in Jesus Christ*, is the most likely way to ingraft this principle deeply. But, alas! the care of the *soul*, which is the *first thing needful*, and which, if attended to, must *necessarily* produce every other good, both to individuals and the public; this is an argument and consideration which the latter class of objectors I have noticed seldom weigh. They argue inconsistently: they stand up for *morality* in the people, because they well know, that without a certain degree of it their *worldly* interest might be endangered; but they are fearful of their becoming too religious, lest *superstition* should creep in at the same time, which ever was the effect of ignorance alone, or false religion.

ligion. They would risk an increase of contempt towards the Deity, and his solemn ordinances, rather than subscribe to a mode of reformation in the multitude, which militates with their infidel prejudices, which universal consent applauds, and against which nothing but wilful obstinacy or unhappy ignorance can object: *But these speak evil of things they understand not. Keep my sabbaths, saith the Lord of hosts, for they shall be a SIGN between me and thee.*

The most effectual battery the grand enemy can raise, is, if possible, to level this sign, to furnish instruments against its preservation and continuance; and in every attempt of this kind (however craftily disguised) the cloven foot is visible, and I hope will ever appear too plainly to do much mischief; but, on the contrary, to put us more upon our guard against his designs, and to persist in greater vigour to defeat their hurtful purposes. And, indeed, we may read an awful lesson, from the approaching miseries of a neighbouring kingdom, of the judgments of God against irreligion, infidelity, and a profanation of the holy day set apart for his service; as I believe
it

it is well known, that in no part of the world, where Christianity is openly professed as the religion of the country, is there a greater mart for loose and infidel productions, or that the Lord's day is more vainly abused by all ranks out of the formal hours of public worship, and that even under the warrant of a disgraceful toleration.

Lastly, There is another circumstance that will render you still more inexcusable, if you decline giving all due support to this undertaking; and that is the facility of its accomplishment, the expence being so trifling, and bearing no proportion to the excellence of the work. *Peace, order, and benefit*, will be derived to our society, the rising generation mended, and our final and best interests promoted by the exertion. To this pious and useful design several of the proprietors of estates in the parish have freely and benevolently contributed: I hoped to have done justice to their Christian intentions sooner, but you must be sensible of the unforeseen and unavoidable accident that has prevented my sincere wishes

wishes to lend earlier assistance to the cause, and promote it as it deserves.

As to the more *selfish* part of mankind, which I fear would furnish another considerable class of objectors, where the *love of money solely* interferes to deaden their better feelings, we can only pray for the softening of their hearts, and that they may cease to serve so base an idol. Nothing can be advanced, with any probability of success, against wilful obstinacy, or unfair conclusions : the covetous man is esteemed in scripture as an idolater; and, therefore, whenever any thing interferes with his *interest*, or the beloved object of his heart's desire, we must give up the point. It is in vain to argue with one who solely considers what will affect his *pocket* : all such must be deemed incorrigible, till the Lord shall please to touch their hearts to feel, and open their eyes to see, the certain blessed effects which perseverance in a good cause will finally accomplish, though *time* may be necessary for their conviction.

I should now proceed, thirdly, to instance one of the strongest proofs of the power of infidelity

infidelity amongst us that can be imagined, and which will confirm the necessity of every exertion to suppress the mischief such principles will inevitably bring upon us; but as I mean to be very full in the exposition of the complaint I have in view, as likewise in my endeavours to defeat the pernicious influence that foul ingratitude may work among us, I must defer the discussion of it till we meet again.

To conclude, therefore, let me earnestly entreat you all, who are persuaded of my good intention in this business, and of the essential advantage of having your children brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, to be most diligent in *seeing* that they attend regularly for the good intended them, laying your commands upon them, previous to their coming, to behave as becomes their situation; and if, on report of their idleness or misbehaviour, you do not also *correct* them, as behoves a truly affectionate parent and friend, all that can be done by your public benefactors, or my poor efforts, will fall greatly short of the end proposed: they will lose the benefits that the studious and well-inclined have now prepared for them;
and,

and, believe me, a most severe and dreadful charge will be registered against all who are guilty of so unnatural a neglect of their incumbent duty.

May the humble means that have at this time been used to impress these truths upon your hearts be blessed to your conviction, through the grace of God, so as to assure comfort and happiness to yourselves and children here, and hereafter everlasting peace and glory.

Now, &c.

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S E R.

S E R M O N IX.

A defence of the gracious influence of Divine Providence in the direction of natural effects.

First Sermon on the happy occasion of his Majesty's recovery.

Atque ita tales, dum Deum declinare cupiunt, eum reverà
sub nomine naturæ agnoscunt.

GROT. de Exist. Dei.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

A report of the Secretary of the Interior
to the President of the United States



The Secretary of the Interior
has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the
report of the Secretary of the Interior

and to inform you that the same has been
forwarded to the President of the United States

S E R M O N IX.

J U D E, ver. 10.

*But these speak evil of those things which
they know not.*

I N concluding my discourse this morning, I promised to produce an instance of human depravity that might further illustrate the *necessity, benefit, and duty* of watching over the principles of youth in general; both to prevent them from early collecting the seeds of evil which the tempter is continually sowing in the world, in order to supply a succession of mischievous instruments; as likewise to arm them against the influence of those persons who have unhappily enlisted in the service of our inveterate foe, and who, through their master's

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subtlety,

subtlety, and their own malevolent ingenuity, are ever seeking whom they may find off their guard, an easy prey to their treacherous designs.

If there can be *any* apology for unbelief, it is gross ignorance; not *stupidity*, but a want of that particular part of education which I have before so amply recommended, as being positively necessary to counteract the poison here alluded to: for there are many enlightened with a great portion of natural knowledge, who are quite dark as to what will essentially profit their immortal part; and the cause of condemnation in all such the apostle declares, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, in the 19th and following verses:

“ Because that which may be known of
 “ God is manifest in this; for God hath
 “ shewn it in them: for the invisible things
 “ of him from the creation of the world
 “ are clearly seen, being understood by the
 “ things that are made, even his eternal
 “ power and godhead; so that they are
 “ without excuse: because that when (by
 “ these works) they knew God (or perceived
 “ there was such a Being of super-
 “ lative

“ lative power and wisdom), they glorified
 “ him not as God, *neither were thankful*;
 “ but being vain in their own imagina-
 “ tions” (the consequence and punishment
 followed), “ their foolish hearts were dark-
 “ ened; professing themselves wise, they
 “ became fools.” And it is most useful to
 observe, how fully the whole remaining
 part of the chapter declares the *variety* of
 sinful practice that proceeds from such infi-
 delity. In this account recorded by Saint
 Paul, we learn also, that ingratitude and
 perverseness lay the foundation of the very
 worst effects of this vice, in that, though
 men’s reason and conscience would lead
 them to the truth, they are neither thank-
 ful for the *one*, nor do they obey the dic-
 tates of the *other*, which is the voice of the
 Deity speaking in them; and therefore, since
 they have perverted the right use of this
 measure of light and grace, God hath
 given them up to the sinfulness of their
 own fallen nature. And indeed this is the
 very state of evil spirits: they know God,
 for his works declare his might; but ingra-
 titude and folly in declining his protection,
 and pride in depending upon their own

power, have forfeited his favour, and they are necessarily subjected to a continual progression in sin and punishment.

But to the point in question, which will furnish ample matter for my present address. I may safely affirm, that by general consent of the nation we are at this particular time under a religious conviction of God's great goodness, in having granted, in his own best season, the blessing our united and fervent prayers have long solicited. Now it must be grievous to observe, that in the very moment of mercy, when multitudes are pouring forth the humble tribute of joyful praise for the wonderful deliverance from universal and oppressive sorrow; any should be so dead to the calls of virtue and religion, as with impious audacity to question the influence of Providence upon his works, and to object to the obvious means of conciliating the Supreme Director, by the confession of our manifold and foul transgressions, and their consequent deserts. It is high time surely, I say, that the strictest precautions should be taken to improve the morals and religious principles of the rising generation, when we thus see
ingratitude

ingratitude and infidelity stalk boldly hand in hand, in open insult of the Deity, and to the disgrace of human nature. For which reason, as it behoves every Christian minister to resist and expose all such tenets as strike at the faith, and may corrupt the practice of his flock, I have judged it no improper supplement to my former discourse, to take notice of some fallacious exceptions that have been made to the holy exercises appointed in our church; and I humbly trust it will appear perfectly consistent with our blessed Lord's injunction to his apostle of *Feed my sheep*, to warn and defend you against the infection you may be likely to receive from the ungracious designs of every vain disputer in the daily vehicles of general intelligence which are in the hands of all; especially in an age when any degree of pious sentiment passes with too many for a tincture of enthusiasm. In truth, whatever may tend to diminish or disturb the purity of religious homage, cannot at any time, or on any occasion, be too early checked, or too carefully disproved.

We need no stronger mark, how little

some men have the love or fear of God before their eyes, than by their endeavours to lower the value of his abundant goodness to his unworthy creatures. That they might lessen, if possible, any consequent happy effect from the devout petitions of God's servants, they have been led to controvert the holy purport of the solemn and judicious forms employed in our late earnest supplications to the throne of Heaven; forms which were truly excellent and venerable, both for their humble terms and pious principle, and elude the utmost art of impious criticism, even if casual ambiguity had essentially existed. Such characters are very properly described in the language of the text, which I purposely selected as more immediately applicable to this part of my subject—"But these speak evil of those things which they understand not:" the truth of which assertion I shall endeavour to establish in the several remarks I shall have occasion to make upon what I have seen advanced to depreciate the acts of contrition, and pious gratitude, which justly distinguish the Christian believer.

One would hardly think it possible (but from public evidence) that where cultivated reason, illuminated by revelation, shone so purely, these dregs of profligacy could subsist; but inveterate prejudices, leagued with infidel suggestions, exhibit the most desperate coalition in human nature: they supply ingredients aptly instrumental to the spirit of malice and commotion, whose emissaries are ever industrious to detract from the glory of God, and to mar the happiness of his creatures. Bad men always scan a good measure by a deficient standard; and whatever proceeds from the qualified authority of superior rank, is apt to give offence to those who disclaim the benefit derived from precedence and order, and who would have all men preach and rule according to the dictates of unsettled fancy.

It affords abundant test that general reformation is expedient to avert impending and deserved punishment, when we see the doctrine of God's providence cavilled at, by shifting public calamities to a necessary consequence of *mere natural causes*, and denying them a share of the *Divine direction in any light of visitation for our transgressions*. Every

good and serious mind cannot avoid being hurt at such a position as this, and to see it publicly disseminated at this *peculiar season* must cause still greater abhorrence. It would be an unprofitable waste of time, and dishonour to this place, to contend with the irreligious insinuations of every vain scoffer; but when the powers of reason are prostituted in order to recommend ungodly maxims, the claims to this sanction should be diligently examined, especially when profaneness unites with error; for the faithful soldier in a better cause cannot be too industrious in preventing evil, by sapping the foundation on which such superstructures have been raised.

It is a certain truth, that nothing is so excellent but what malicious wickedness will strive to calumniate. Diabolical craft is ever vigilant to surprise some unguarded post of piety and virtue; and upon this odious principle it has been erroneously suggested by some industrious partizan of infidelity, seeking to turn the unwary from the faith, that the language *of our prayers has been misconceived*; that the late indisposition of the Sovereign could not be justly termed

a *visitation for the people's sins*, because no sudden and effectual change of manners in the people is evident on the removal of the malady, which the objector takes for granted would be the obvious consequence of a *vicarious punishment*; and therefore asserts the impropriety of any such notion being implied or received in that form of prayer administered in humble hope that God would graciously avert the judgment, by granting us the blessing we petitioned. It is as unsoundly as irreverently maintained, *that the disorder sprang from natural causes, and that natural causes alone produced the cure.* The exclamation of the apostle, upon an occasion something similar, is too pertinent to be forborn against such stubborn unbelief: "O full of all subtlety, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord!"

Thank God, it is no difficult task to overthrow such reasoning as the above, and expose the evil tendency of the doctrine. To which end I shall,

First, employ a few plain arguments to convince you that the misfortune which lately

lately threatened us, may most truly be considered as *a visitation from Heaven for the punishment of our transgressions.*

Secondly, I will shew you that the notion of vicarious punishment does not infer the absolute necessity of any sudden and universal reformation to *prove* it such. And,

Thirdly, That a disorder and cure, though proceeding, in one sense, from natural causes and effects, does in no respect exclude the act of Divine Providence from the use of these very means to inflict punishment, or confer mercy.—I proceed thus :

If the government of an upright prince is registered among God's choicest gifts to mankind (which might be clearly supported from various passages of the inspired volume), then the happiness which any nation derives from such a favour, is doubtless to be estimated *as a blessing.* Now the sudden diminution of any good, by whatever means effected, is surely a *misfortune*, and must, in a religious point of view, be considered as a *punishment.* And as we are told that "affliction does not spring out of the dust," we may reasonably conclude there

there is a hand of wisdom in the direction : in which case, the visitation in question must either be inflicted for the trespasses of the numbers who are most interested in the loss, or for the punishment of the patient himself. Now the character of the Sovereign being as exemplary for every moral excellence that his station and human nature can admit (both in a private and public capacity), as that of the people at large is notorious for remissness in religious concerns, it is impossible to allow the least probable surmise that it was incurred by personal demerit in the former; and therefore the natural conclusion is, that *“* it was a visitation with which it seemed good to God to afflict his servant, for the punishment of our transgressions.*

And now to the second observation. The supposition that a punishment is *not vicarious*, because it does not produce *immediate* reformation in a people, is equally trifling and false with the former assertion; and shews great ignorance of the very nature of such kind of punishment: the end of which

* Words of the prayer appointed to be publicly used during his Majesty's illness.

is clearly *admonitory* and *conditional*; to remind us of what is preparing for the guilty, and, by impressing terror of the severer punishment they deserve, to effect timely consideration, and avert the endless judgments that will otherwise befall them. Even the grand vicarious visitation, though in the strictest sense a covenant of grace, is ultimately efficacious only on certain *terms*; which shews that religion and reformation are progressive in their influence, and that rational creatures must be wrought upon by rational consequences. Such a general and sudden change as is weakly judged essential to prove the hand of Heaven in our late danger, would need miraculous and compulsory interposition; whereas we are taught by God himself, that his *long-suffering* is continued in order to *lead us to repentance*. This visitation may therefore still produce its good effect in the sense of conviction and amendment, though not so instantaneous, and universally visible, as quibbling infidelity would urge so necessary. But who will impiously dare to ascertain that the threatened calamity has not *already* roused the lethargy of many sinners; and that

that a sense of their errors, and a grateful impulse, may not invigorate much future pious resolution? Shall frail, short-sighted, sinful mortals, presume to question the powerful workings of the Most High, or limit the value of his gracious purposes? What was his reply when his holy and favourite prophet ventured to lament the want of *visible testimony* of the people's zeal? "I have still seven thousand left that have not bowed the knee to Baal:" and for whose sake, doubtless, vengeance at all times will be withheld. All God's designs are fraught with good, and equally exceed our merit, and our search. But the argument for this visitation partaking of a *vicarious* nature, is further strengthened from the original institution of all such punishment, both typical and actual. The innocent is invariably visited for the guilty; the most unblemished victim for the foulest sin. The personal worth of the sufferer being thus indisputable, and the general delinquency as readily granted, what possible deduction can be drawn from this second state of the question, but that *the visitation was permitted for our transgressions*: not in the
sense

sense of a sufficient atonement to *do away the guilt of them*; but as a temporary punishment, as a merciful warning, to profit us, and lead us to seize the gracious means afforded for amendment, lest a worse thing befall us?

Thirdly, Let us now examine the plea of *natural causes and effects*; and judge whether they in the least invalidate my argument for the providential exercise of those very means, either in the display of God's punishments or mercies.

The sound believer will not dispute but that we live under the direction of an all-wise disposing Being, who teaches that events come not by chance, or without appointment, but are messengers dispatched upon his errands, who has an over-ruling hand in all the disasters that befall us, whatever else may be the outward occasion of our hurts. God's operating by miracles has ceased; all nature is at his command: he who first brought it into being, can never be at a loss how to direct its powers in every case whatever. There is no necessity for extraordinary influence to render it subservient to the purposes of his mercies; he

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is the supreme cause, and directs the agency of secondary causes (or *nature*) to slay, or heal, as suits the counsel of his unerring wisdom; and the event of his high will becomes no less a blessing or a curse, because conveyed in the plainer form of *natural effects*: for no one, I apprehend, will venture to affirm, that man hath yet investigated or understands all the *ordinary* workings of the course of nature. When our blessed Saviour gave sight to the man who was born blind, he wrought a miracle, because he acted by preternatural power; for the part being originally deficient in that formation which is necessary to admit the light, no one could remedy it but the hand who *made* it: but when God was pleased to direct his prophet to the cure of his servant Hezekiah, he advised him to the simplest remedy imaginable, and, as ever must be, only his needful blessing or merciful will was sufficient to produce the happy effect; but his mercy was equally an object of praise for directing to, or permitting, the *cause*, which otherwise most certainly would never have been applied: and it is further very pertinent to our present

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sent subject, that this favour was in consequence of earnest and unfeigned supplication to God for help, and in consideration too of the former virtuous conduct of the king; and in the immediate case that interests our common happiness, the providential care is no less evident in leading to the choice of the most skilful of the profession, and blessing his natural endeavours for success.

Other *material* circumstances might be advanced, of weighty import in this particular case, to illustrate my position, that God conducts the operation of mere natural causes and effects to the accomplishment of his designs, without any arbitrary controul or intervention in their progress: but enough, I should hope, has been said to satisfy the humble, reasonable, and religious enquirer. To open the eyes of those *wilfully* blind requires a miracle indeed; it is out of the reach of mere man to effect it: and as this disorder proceeds solely from the depravity of the human mind, all that we can do is to pray to God *to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*: even this too he hath most graciously promised to bring about through the use of natural means;

means; studying his holy word; humbly confessing our great weakness, ignorance, and unworthiness; and constantly applying to him for grace and help.

I shall sum up the whole I have to offer upon this subject at present in these few observations:—That from a due regard to the deserved estimation of the Sovereign, the peculiar nature of the visitation in a personal light, and the importance of *either* event to the community, we may safely affirm that the arm of the Lord was raised in terror for our misdeeds; but withheld from executing, through merciful consideration of our prayers.

And now having contributed *my* mite of aid in combatting the invidious devices of the reprobate, and in vindicating the purity and propriety of our appointed public form of contrition for our demerit, and supplication to Almighty God to vouchsafe unto us the blessing we now enjoy; I shall close my address to you with submitting to the judgment of all serious and sensible persons, whether seeing the evil tendency of unbelief, and an ignorance of God's nature and will, the prevention of dangerous and un-

settled principles is not an object of the most important concern, both to the welfare of individuals, as well as to the credit and advantage of the community at large : and whether any mode can be more likely to effect so valuable an end, as the early cultivation of sound and religious truths, such as cannot fail to promote the glory of God, and the best interests of his creatures.

As I am fully convinced in my own mind that no method ever was, or ever can be invented, more effectual for the curbing every kind of vice, and promoting every substantial virtue, than a preservative against breaking the Sabbath, and thereby instilling a reverence for God's name, day, and word ; you cannot wonder at my using every means that a proper and unfeigned wish for your most essential happiness can suggest, to recommend and promote this useful establishment among us ; and which, I will venture to affirm, was never opposed by any one possessing a particle of *sterling* benevolence, *Christian* spirit, or *godly* zeal. I have only to add, that I entered into the particular argument of this discourse, and have treated it with the utmost closeness
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and zeal, merely from a consciousness of my duty towards those I am commissioned to instruct in the ways of all peaceable good order, and holiness of life; from a fear of God, a love of the Sovereign he hath appointed over us, and regard to our country. When the profane, the profligate, and the ignorant, presume to intrude their insidious and malignant suggestions against what is pure, and just, and holy, we have certainly a right to use sober and prudent measures to defeat their dark designs. To be *silent* on such occasions, would wear an appearance either of conniving at their principles, or being unable to refute them; and I humbly trust what has now been offered to you for this end, carries a fair demonstration, that “these speak evil of those things which they know not.” May God grant us all daily more and more knowledge of his truth, and in the world to come life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, &c.

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S E R M O N X.

*The display of God's mercy an urgent motive
to praise and reformation.*

A Thanksgiving Sermon on his Majesty's
recovery.

P A R T I.

—ερεπτοὶ δέ τε καὶ θεοὶ αὐτοὶ,
τῶν περ καὶ μείζων ἀρετῇ, τιμὴ τε, βίη τε.
καὶ μὲν τὰς θυέσσι καὶ ευχολῆς ἀγαῶσι
δοιῶν τε, κρίσιν τε, παρατρωπῶσ' ἄνθρωποι
λίσσόμενοι, ὅτε κεν τις ὑπερβῇ καὶ ἀμάρτη.

HOM. II. lib. ix. l. 493.

Hic dies vere mihi festus atras
Eximet curas: Ego nec tumultum,
Nec mori per vim metuum, tenente
Cæsare terras.

HOR.



S E R M O N X.

*We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge
thee to be the Lord.*

I Will open my address to you this day, my brethren, with that solemn asseveration of St. Paul, “ The God and Father “ of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed “ for evermore, knoweth that I lie not,” in declaring to you, that no subject of public happiness ever actuated me with higher transports of heart-felt joy, than the happy occasion of our now assembling together.

The blessing we are here met to celebrate, my friends, is distinguished by such astonishing favour, is accompanied with such essential benefits, and, from peculiarity of

circumstances, so nearly approaching miraculous interposition, that no praise can be sufficient to mark our sense of the Divine bounty, and extol the long suffering and tender mercies of the Lord. The voice of men and angels joined in pious chorus would fail in adequate return : how then shall I presume to acquit myself in any degree becoming such a tribute of just thanksgiving ? I could wish for the most brilliant eloquence, to proclaim my own sincerity upon this pleasing occasion, and also to raise your feelings to the highest pitch of pious gratitude ; but He who knoweth the heart will accept purity of intention, in preference to sublimity of performance. Instead, therefore, of attempting merit from the imperfect exhibition of mere mortal efforts, let us, as becomes our dependant sinful state—let us fall low before the footstool of his grace, and praise him in his own inspired words : “ O give thanks unto the Lord, “ for he is gracious, and his mercy endureth “ for ever.”

Still the deep sense of favour exacts the best display of those talents we possess ; and with one single spark of actual fervour
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in the soul, it is impossible to refrain the dictates of religious principle, or suppress the sentiments of grateful joy.

Holy praise, and pastoral exhortation, will naturally supply the subject of my present discourse; the first, to shew how duly impressed we ought to be with the high bounty bestowed upon us; and secondly, that we may be wisely cautious to avert the future heavy visitations of an offended God: that we may continue happy objects of divine protection, and experience a long succession of the blessed promises held out to such as walk humbly in his ways. May we, my friends, in the true spirit of religious faith, be enabled to confess, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear."

The brightest imagination could not sufficiently represent, nor can the mind of man admit a more exalted notion of becoming homage, than the *general worship of a nation*, bowing as with one knee, applying as with one voice, in humblest supplication to that supreme Director, who holdeth all things in the power of his might;
stricken

stricken with conscious sorrow for their offences, terrified at the prospect of their deserved punishment, and urging, from affection, piety and contrition joined, the precious life of a BELOVED KING. This act presents us with such an unfeigned scene of incumbent duty, as plainly evidences the creature's due reliance on its Maker's power. This, my friends, is but a faint picture of the late general application to Almighty God, to stay his impending vengeance.

Under the deep and just affliction, therefore, we have all experienced during a painful and long suspense, from the melancholy circumstance of our Sovereign's malady, threatening such mournful consequences, the tribute of our praise for his recovery must now proportionably abound. The quick and animating transition from excess of grief to lively joy, tunes high the natural spirits, and qualifies us to exclaim in godly transport, "Thy way, O God, is holy: who is
"so great a God as our God? Thou art
"the God that doth wonders, and hast de-
"clared thy power among thy people."

To help our consistent meditations on
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this occasion, it may be useful to revert to the universal and sickening panic that seized us on the first intelligence of the alarming danger ; to recal the sense of fearful apprehension that attended every enquiry : even virtue began to droop ; public credit felt the approaching shock ; the propitious progress of patriotic effort relaxed in motion, conscious of the need of its invigorating spring to render it effectual. The peaceable, the upright, the grateful subject sunk into despondency : only the wicked triumphed in pernicious hope ; which, blessed be God, was but of short continuance : nay, none but the desperate, even of *that* description, but what partook of the general sorrow : for when the dread of suffering in the public loss alarmed the *selfish* principles, then accusing conscience would naturally let loose the ministers of sharp remorse, and galling reprehension, upon the relenting mind ; then all who supply ill gotten gain, by the unworthy traffic of licentious means, must have sorely felt accumulated guilt ; those, for example, who derive a quick but cankering profit from fostering the abuse of pen and pencil, in the
 prostituted

prostituted talents of the needy and unprincipled genius—men who are a pest to the community, and a disgrace to human nature. To reflect how basely they had often sported with sacred characters, with ungrateful insult deriding the most innocent pursuits that can relieve the toils of public station:—this remonstrance (but where the heart was petrified by profligacy) must have reproached such foul ingratitude, upon the sudden report that danger threatened the life of so generous and assiduous a patron of every liberal art and science. In truth (although I am sensible it is in some measure digressing from my subject) I could not forbear a few words upon the relaxed restriction of this description of vitiated authors and designers, who promote an evil of most dangerous influence to society at large; are a disgrace to a loyal, polished people, to a Christian land; and afford such offensive tokens in every street we pass, by feeding the silly scoff of fools, and the loose mirth of the dissolute, with foul variety of polluted fancy, as not only to contaminate the tender mind of youth, but to attract the concern and wonder of the foreigner,

foreigner, and shock the feeling of every serious fellow citizen. It is a disgraceful excrescence, attached to the fair form of liberty, which mighty blessing vice perverts to noxious purposes, in the particular case before us, and demonstrates that the most excellent of things is liable to be abused, that imperfection lurks in the very essence of every human institution: still even this evil, like many bodily deformities and disorders, we must be content to *palliate*, lest, by violently attempting radical cure, we should endanger the life or vigour of the subject.

But to return to the recollection of our recent fears:—Who can convey any just idea of the poignant and ineffable affliction which daily preyed upon the delicate and susceptible minds of those high and amiable characters, whose dearest portion of worldly comfort seemed in hourly danger of being withdrawn for ever? We can only *feel* for them; to describe such grief, evades the power of words. Their united and unceasing petitions have been heard; in God's good time, the sweet smelling savour of humble, earnest sacrifice has proved acceptable

ceptable to the MOST HIGH. We may suppose the healing angel commissioned with the welcome FIAT ; and, winged with that joy which the discharge of good affords to the celestial messenger, hastening to pronounce this merciful assurance: “ I have
 “ seen his ways, and I will heal him ; I
 “ will lead him also, and restore com-
 “ forts both to him, and to his mourn-
 “ ers.”

As this is a day devoted to the celebration of so great a blessing, let us now give way to every pleasing reflection, from the enlivening reverse of prospect. It has often been observed, that a state of convalescence is attended with such sensations of extreme delight, that it abundantly repays the period of complaint : and, more powerfully to describe the excess of satisfaction supposed to accompany a recovery from *danger*, it has been even said, that it is worth while to suffer, in order to experience this inexpressible gratification. If ever the truth of this idea was exemplified, it could never be more conspicuously than in the case before us : where religious sentiment so eminently unites to enhance the returning comfort, exquisite

exquisite indeed must be the sense of so valuable a blessing. " Verily there is a reward " for the righteous," is here demonstrated in the highest degree on earth ; for what can equal the reflections of a virtuous mind, in exercising a retrospect to such a scene of serious sorrow for its sufferings ; the sincerity of which is amply proved by the present excess of joy, and forms another degree of pure self-gratulation ? How exalted must be the satisfaction, to know that all the good of every party, sect, and description of men at home ; all people, languages, and nations, to whom the unblemished character of our Sovereign hath extended ; did unanimously join in pious wishes for his life ! What a fund of holy consolation must arise in the soul of the royal personage, to meditate upon the gracious event of such general and unfeigned petitions for his preservation ; upon the unbounded love of his subjects, so universally, so magnificently displayed throughout his kingdoms ; and, above all, in experiencing the faithful promises of the Lord, " That he will not fail his people " that cry to him in their trouble, but deliver them out of their distress ! " And as
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this has been so largely *our* case, well may we exclaim, “ O that men would there-
 “ fore praise the Lord for his goodness,
 “ and declare the wonders that he doth
 “ for the children of men.”

Another species of our royal Master's present satisfaction, must be to learn the steady zeal of his public servants, in the *real* interests of his family, crown, and person ; consulting to the utmost of their abilities, the upright discharge of their several trusts ; their affectionate test of strenuous fidelity, under the most delicate and trying situations, which, nothing but strict integrity could produce ; their laudable perseverance under religious hope, that Heaven at length would prove propitious to the national prayer ; and their disinterested conduct in being unbiaſſed by any views, but what, upon cool, impartial, and unprejudiced judgment, must be allowed the sanction of generous and tender sentiment, no less than an unfeigned regard to the peace and happiness of the state. The whole composes such luxurious food for grateful contemplation, as only a good man can conceive or taste, as only a good man could *deserve*.

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The living testimony of a people's love affords another portion of accumulating comfort : it hath been instanced once already ; and the solemn service of the present day and hour furnishes new marks of sterling joy, rendered still more pleasing, awful, and incumbent, from the value of the King's command flowing from an impulse of religious gratitude. The presence of the Sovereign on his throne assuredly will excite repeated exultation from truly loyal and affectionate subjects. But there is, if possible, a still more endearing and exalted comfort to be depicted ; the happy restoration to that sweet society, which, when endued with virtue, refined accomplishments, and engaging manners, triumphs over every other felicity this world can boast : the mutual exchange of inviolable affection ; the returning relish for that substantial happiness which is the reward of domestic concord, and the purest ties ; the consciousness that all their griefs are hushed ; and the sharing that renewed composure in those so dear, who cannot so well speak as *look* their happiness : these are sensations which exceed description, the

value of which can only be acknowledged by the person interested. These unbend the cares of majesty, repay the toils of governing, and unite the unrivalled characters of MONARCH, FRIEND, and PARENT. "Such hope in trouble doth ever remain
"to upright kings."

It might be exceptionable, in the opinion of some perhaps, even upon so singular an occasion as the present, and however fruitful the pleasing theme, to enter upon particulars of personal merit: in truth, it is superfluous, when the general joy subscribes the highest desert, and purest claims; and therefore I will content myself with one single description in the prophet's words, which amply suits my present purpose, to convey to you a brief but just idea of the blessing we enjoy in such a king. "He
"trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that
"there was none like him among all the
"kings of Judah, for he clave unto the
"Lord, and departed not from following
"him; he kept the commandment which
"the Lord commanded Moses."

This beloved king, like ours, my friends, began his reign when young; yet his zeal

for the honour of God, and promoting virtue and religion among his people, carried him through the greatest difficulties and visitations; “ for the Lord upholdeth the “ righteous.” And great is the foundation of good hope from early pious resolutions; for they ever flow from a heart disposed towards the Author of all perfection: and it is well known, and worthy of remembrance, that something of this kind foretold the character of our gracious Sovereign, at the commencement of his reign, ‘ that he would encourage the religious, ‘ and discountenance those that were otherwise.’ This naturally rejoiced the hearts of all who were blessed with true wisdom to discern the most excellent of things, and which pure intention doubtless prepared that store of rich oblation, which of late has been incessantly presented, and most mercifully accepted, by the Lord of life and health, and every good we enjoy. In this conclusion we are strengthened by the testimony of the holy Job, “ that God pre- “ serveth not the life of the wicked; that “ he withdraweth not his eyes from the “ righteous, but with kings are they on

“ the throne ; yea, he doth establish them
 “ for ever, and they are exalted.”

From these assertions of the Lord Jehovah, by the mouth of his chosen prophets and most approved servants, we may humbly infer, that the religious exercises of all good men have ascended up on high. Nor would it have been presumption to build hope, even upon the separate incense devoutly offered by the Royal Consort, under the influence of pure religious trust, and the deep anguish of natural affliction : “ For
 “ the eyes of the Lord are over the right-
 “ teous, and his ears are ever open to their
 “ good.”—“ Thine alms and prayers are
 “ come up for a memorial,” is an encouragement to all godly perseverance. The public patronage afforded by this illustrious personage to the most engaging and useful charities ; her extensive and cheering efforts of more private beneficence ; and her invariable zeal and delicate regard to promote the peace and happiness of the nation, all tend to ingratiate so excellent a character, and must command the tribute of affectionate respect from every one not wholly dead to the converting charms of virtue.

A rational,

A rational, uniform, and unaffected piety adds the highest lustre to those other attainments which compose her character, and must have warranted some qualified hope of favourable effect, from the unwearied importunity of such a suppliant to the throne of mercy.

To you, who are removed by humility of station from any opportunity of extraordinary intelligence, and whose allegiance and veneration towards the powers appointed over us may render it a pleasing circumstance to hear their virtues, it being my duty to confirm and cherish such becoming principles, I will inform you what I once was told respecting the retired employments of this high character: that the assortment of the books, which appeared selected for more private study, consisted all of pious authors, and those most purely chosen, and evangelical; a pattern of essential imitation to elevated rank; evincing a just persuasion *where* full dependance must be fixed, in order to obtain the power of discharging properly the arduous duties of superior dignity, and that the worthy exercise of worldly honours leads to the enjoyment of

the brightest reward hereafter. When we advert to the holy source whence *only* such angelic progress can proceed, amidst the vast variety of alluring and distracting hindrances to genuine piety, the conflict rises in admiration; and we may joyfully account for the experience of the Divine favour in the subject of our present praise, which cannot but bless the means its own power bestows, in recompence of promise to the faithful votary.

Having now expatiated upon the first part of my subject, in order to convince you of the real blessing we might have lost, and to establish a permanent memorial of grateful praise in all our hearts for the valuable benefits continued to us, I come now to the second division of my discourse; but as this involves much serious observation and advice; as it is a subject that by no means should expire with this particular service, and the Lord's day being so near at hand, I shall defer what I have judged proper further to say upon this glorious event till we meet again in this place; and for the present I will only warn you, my friends, that the more signal the favour we have
received,

received, the more tremendous will be the consequence of future provocation. Let us not, because the Almighty is long suffering, and slow to anger, incense him to make short work with us at last; for dreadful will be the visitation upon an ungrateful, obstinate, and wilfully wicked people. Let us, on the contrary, employ such caution over our religious and moral conduct, as may assure a long continuance of the Divine protection: we cannot now be too circumspect in avoiding to offend so good a God. I would not unseasonably intrude any terrifying or gloomy thoughts in the very moment of the present joy, and therefore have postponed my promised application to another time: but still I must recommend the absolute necessity and obvious decency of a *sober rejoicing*. For this good end, as far as the little ability of our place enables us to testify an humble token of further gratitude to God, and affection for our Sovereign, in the exertion of such innocent means as may render our poorer brethren cheerfully thankful and more mindful of the day, all such methods have been discouraged as might hazard an excess of ri-

otous mirth, or [vicious indulgence; and such a feast will be provided for every needy person in the parish, as may do credit to the cause. I would therefore most earnestly admonish all of that description (to whom I now particularly address myself) to remember, that debauchery is a most foul return to God Almighty for the great mercies you have received in common with your fellow subjects, and no ways indicating respectful and becoming notice of your Sovereign's command.

I will close my present address with a thought that just occurs to me on this occasion, and which perhaps may strike you by its awful prospect, and lead to the most useful meditations.

At this very time, my friends, the illustrious object of our humble and hearty tribute of thanksgiving to Almighty God is *uniting* in the same due acknowledgment of his favour, attended by a host of grateful people; the whole nation likewise is equally employed in one solemn pleasing act of holy worship. How heavenly is the idea to a serious mind! How naturally should each of us be pleased to form a part of this loyal
cavalcade,

cavalcade, or even to be spectators of the affecting sight ! To afford you any just notion of such a scene far exceeds the utmost effort of my abilities ; perhaps the subject falls more properly within the province of a pencil, than of words : but I will try how far I can assist your fancy, to *prepare* you better for what now possesses my mind. Only imagine, then, a town of miles in length, every house close filled, and every house-top heavy with eager, joyous, and loyal spectators : the streets appearing, as it were, paved with human faces. The prodigious multitude assembled, fancy them forgetting their natural disposition to tumult and mischief, and awed into tranquillity and respect, from expectation of the approaching object of their joy ; on tip-toe, straining to gratify some of those exquisite sensations, which would do honour to the most refined of their species. At length the Sovereign appears, calm and contemplative, and seriously impressed with the part he bears in the sacred solemnity. Conceive the grandeur of an immense cathedral, its extensive area thronged with exulting crowds, excluding any possibility of admittance :

admittance: but let us imagine the *inside* of the sanctuary, and connect *solemnity* and *devotion* with the utmost grandeur of *appearance*. To hear ten thousand voices sound all at once the praises of Jehovah, would thrill our blood with pious ecstasy, and rouse the soul to awful meditation. This probably is nothing like an adequate idea of the scene *now* passing: but suppose it is, and that it is a thousand times more noble still; yet what is *this*, my friends, to *that* assembly and procession, in which all present may bear a part, in a far more exalted state of being? The day may come, if we but wisely use the blessed opportunity afforded us, when, stripped of these incumbrances of our mortal bodies—when (to use the apostle's striking and beautiful similitude) the tent or tabernacle in which we are now *shut up* shall be *lifted off*, and unfading day and celestial air shall refresh our long imprisoned spirits; when myriads of delivered souls will in a moment be familiar to our sight, and render the proudest scene of worldly pageantry as insignificant and mean, as comparatively this body is to its immortal part. Nay, though separated as we
are

are now, by the wise and necessary order of creation, and discriminating providence; and therefore approaching our temporal Sovereign with becoming deference and humility; the very poorest of you all, at that great day, when "high and low, rich and "poor, shall meet together," if you have behaved yourselves proportionably to the respective talents you have received, may then have hope to face your Sovereign without that dread which mortal circumstances render proper; and, though you may *never* see him *here*, shall then be qualified to *judge* of those exalted virtues, which in the high capacity of a religious monarch prepare his way for crowns of glory. Then every friend will be remembered, every enemy forgotten; for where virtue only can be admitted, nothing but happiness can reign. Then you will reap the recompence of peaceable deportment, submission to authority, and just allegiance to your king. And though in heaven there are many mansions, and the *brightest* crowns will be bestowed on those who patiently endure the *greatest trials*; and the reward of virtue given according to its progress in posts of eminence

eminence and danger ; yet, as we shall then see things clearly, and face to face, every *degree* of good will be understood by all, and one grand object employ them equally—THE PRAISES OF AN INFINITE GOD, the endless wondering at his marvellous mercy and arrangements ; and, above all, at that inestimable instance in the unbounded love of our ever blessed Master and Redeemer, who hath merited and prepared such high rewards, as far surpass the utmost services of the best of mortals, and will attract our grateful consideration to all eternity : such bliss as can be only measured by those great and precious promises made to HIM who died to purchase them for all his faithful servants. That we may all partake of this glorious inheritance, God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

28 SE6D

S E R-

S E R M O N X I.

*Divine forbearance, a gracious admonition to
future circumspection.*

A Thanksgiving Sermon on his Majesty's
recovery.

P A R T I I.

Ὅσκι θεοῖς ἐπιπέθῃται, μάλα τ' ἔκλυοι αὐτῶ.

HOM. II. lib. i. l. 218.

Veterum recentiumque admonens.

TACIT. Hist.



S E R M O N XI.

I SAM. xii. 25.

But if ye still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.

WHEN I addressed you last from this place, upon the subject of public thanksgiving to Almighty God, for his great mercy shewn to us in the happy recovery of our Sovereign from his late severe and dangerous indisposition, I concluded with the first division of my discourse; which consisted of grateful praise, and an interesting enlargement upon the various and blessed effects of God's goodness towards our gracious monarch and ourselves. I then gave you my reasons for reserving this second part of the subject to the present opportunity: which is intended to convey a
wholesome

wholesome admonition-and earnest exhortation to deport ourselves in future with such holy circumspection, as may prevent the anger of the Lord from returning, and secure to us a long continuance of the Divine favour and protection.

In this late instance of God's great goodness, we have stronger demands upon our gratitude than ever; and the more justly alarming must be our apprehensions of the *severest* retribution, if we abuse such fatherly clemency, or do not profit by it: let us hope, on the contrary, "that many shall see it, and fear, and put their trust in the Lord."

It is a circumstance of valuable memorial, that in the case of Pharaoh, and his people, the long-suffering and abundant miracles of the Lord only served to *harden their hearts*: there is this indisputable difference between *their* case and *ours*, that their final visitation and destruction seems, by the history, to have been incurred, in great measure, through the unbelieving perverseness of the king himself; we may however infer, without presumption, that the former long-continued and general transgressions

transgressions of the people *jointly* incensed the Lord against them, and provoked him to destroy them both together : though the wicked obstinacy of their ruler is more particularly mentioned. But with *us* the provocation, doubtless, must be attributed to our own particular misconduct, the unrestrained iniquity of individuals composing the burthen of national delinquency. If the example set us, in the deportment of our Royal Governor, was religiously adhered to by all of superior rank and station, there would be but little dread of our falling so ready a prey to those wiles of the enemy, which derive additional influence from the licentious practices of the rich and powerful, whereby the manners of the inferior orders of the community become infected.

Let us therefore use the utmost caution not to harden ourselves in sin ; let us not, by wilful blindness, and wicked obstinacy, deserve that worthless character, “ that be-
 “ cause sentence against an evil work is not
 “ executed speedily, therefore the heart of the
 “ sons of men is fully set in them to do evil :”
 nor let us audaciously presume, because we are not permitted to indulge the present
 VOL. II. T natural

natural feelings of our joy, that it was for any desert of *ours* the threatened judgment was withdrawn. The Lord hath many and sore scourges in store to punish us, though scarce any more afflictive and affecting than that we have escaped. No, not for our righteousness, but to the tender mercies of the Lord, do we attribute the abundant instances of his kindness we have so eminently and uninterruptedly experienced. And, lest we should deceive ourselves with any vain persuasion of this nature, I would remind you, that the condescending favour of the Great Omniscient God is often bestowed in consideration of a slender portion of his faithful servants: “ I will “ not destroy the city even for ten’s sake.”

Humility constitutes the vital spirit of devotion; and, if we hope for lasting marks of heavenly indulgence, we must pray to be made duly sensible of our great deficiency in this essential virtue; and that we only merit vengeance, was “ the Lord extreme “ to visit our transgressions.”

1. The test of purity in a people is the general veneration they discover for *holy ordinances* : 2. Ingratitude is the most fatal

fatal symptom of inveterate guilt. It will be perfectly suitable to this part of my discourse, to dwell a little on both these articles; and I shall conclude with a short, but pointed, application to our own particular case and conduct.

Candid confession and common notice will too fully prove, that, as a nation, we are grossly wanting in the bounden duties which mark the character of a grateful and religious people; as dependent creatures upon that mighty Being, who made, preserves, and prospers us. I will not trespass upon you with a long list of those pernicious vices which are openly committed and abetted, and, from the alarming circumstance of high example and flagitious habit are passed by as trivial, as the consequent appendages of affluence and leisure: but I will rest the proof of a general failure in duty upon our progressed eviation from the *first* mark I specified as the valuable indication of national virtue. Let us then, by some short and pertinent queries, examine whether we are not greatly strayed from the right way, and how expedient

it is that a speedy and general reformation should take place.

1. Do the multitude sufficiently avail themselves of the blessing of an established church? Is the public worship of Almighty God an object of indispensable concern with most men? Are religious ordinances attended to with that constancy becoming a godly community? or is the honour of the Deity in any remarkable degree the ruling principle of high or low? Do not the generality of those *apparently* most indebted to his bounty, and providential distinction from their brethren, manifestly abuse their plenty and their power, by perverting the blessing of the first to the most wasteful and corruptive purposes, and the second too often in preference of the undeserving (while the humble, and the industrious, are left to pine, and to appeal, and drudge on, in vain); instead of using them to the glory of the Giver, and the comfort of the needy and unfortunate; by which more wise disposal they are in mercy calculated to secure the possession of everlasting treasures? In short, do not too many live
in

in a manner “ without God in the world;” thankless for every blessing they enjoy, and devoted wholly to carnal lusts and appetites; quite dead in trespasses and sin, and perfectly regardless of any remedy or danger; and as to the necessity of a *Redeemer*, wholly ignorant? Which leads to a still more serious and important examination.

Further then, Are we duly sensible or concerned to learn for whose sake alone any state of trial is allotted to a race of frail unworthy creatures, who, when they have done all, are but unprofitable servants? What degree of lively faith do we exhibit in the merits and influence of that adorable person who stood in the *gap of God's wrath*, and, when man had fallen from innocence, and was consequently separated from communion with his Maker, did, in the deep mysterious council of Divine love, make satisfaction for the offence, obtained remission of all sin, through the medium of repentance, and likewise the power of reunion and recovery? Do we demonstrate any saving sense of the covenant upon which Christ's kingdom is set up; viz. an efficient share of his regenerating spirit,

which shews itself in true conviction, contrition of heart, and such essential tokens of a new man formed within us, as to be dead to this world, further than it can be enjoyed to the honour of God, and as a passage of discipline and probation to fit us for a better state of being? Is our belief of evangelical revelation so substantial, as to procure us rational peace and joy concerning our future state; by convincing us of the absolute necessity of obeying its precepts, with sincere *endeavour* at least, though mortal frailty keeps us far short of the pattern? And finally, that it is through our immaculate Advocate, who hath triumphed over sin and death, that all the promises are founded, and have been confirmed, of our rising again, and living with him for ever? In short, that there is no other name under heaven by which salvation can be obtained, to man, but that of Jesus Christ? These, my good friends, you must confess (if you have any knowledge of the religion of your country), are most essential properties of a Christian's faith. Alas! how many live as if they did not credit one article of this creed; much less, that they are all indispensable

indispensable to salvation ! Can we think, my brethren, that this doing despite to the Spirit of grace will always go unheeded, or can possibly finish well ? Let us profit by the wise man's caution : “ Though a
 “ sinner do evil an hundred times, and his
 “ days be prolonged ; yet surely I know it
 “ shall not be well with the wicked in the
 “ end, because he feareth not before God.”

As is the fate threatened throughout scripture to individuals, the like, depend upon it, will befall the collective body of all nations finally, who *despise both the chastening and tender mercies of the Lord*, who harden their hearts not to benefit by the time of their visitation. On both “ the day
 “ will come as a thief in the night.” It has happened so once to a whole world, whom no gracious dispensation, or revelation, even for ages, could persuade ; and thus hath it been with millions of perverse, deluded sinners, who have rashly slighted the repeated warnings proffered them in these later and more enlightened times ; and thus may we surely expect it will be with *us*, if we continue “ to anger God and break his
 “ covenant ; if we provoke him to wrath by

“ our evil works, and augment the fierce
 “ wrath of the Lord against us.”

I would now request your attention to the *second* symptom of that inveterate disorder, which marks us prominently for a backsliding graceless people ; and which I fear, from the above estimate of our religious habits, will be found to have taken such deadly root, as ultimately to induce the most lamentable events, unless we gather wisdom by the gracious warnings that are daily given us.

Ingratitude is the foulest stain that can be charged on creatures, who are indebted for every comfort, nay their very being, to the free pleasure of an holy God. Such unworthy returns as, more or less, we all discover in the very hour of almost miraculous preservation, accumulate the guilt ; and yet the melancholy experience is against us, both in public and private life, and especially as a highly favoured community. Abundant are the admonitions in holy writ, “ not to trust in uncertain riches,” or to temporary success, “ but in the living God :” and it ought to be an awakening caution, that “ the prosperity of fools
 “ shall

“ shall destroy them.” Wherefore, instead
 of being high-minded from good fortune,
 we should constantly keep in view the
 wholesome counsel of the Lord himself;
 “ to fear and tremble for all the goodness,
 “ and for all the prosperity that I pour up-
 “ on them, for by prosperity will I con-
 “ found many.” In truth, my brethren,
 the subject of these two articles of exami-
 nation is so prolific in its evidence against
 us, that it is almost endless to investigate
 our failure in each particular : I shall only
 therefore, at present, slightly notice a succe-
 sion of events, which more pointedly mark
 the singular regard of Providence for the
 common weal of this land ; and, at the same
 time, our as gross insensibility of his good-
 ness, by reproachable remissness in every
 serious habit, and the rash pursuit of the
 most disgraceful and licentious practices.
 To give no *other* proof of the latter, what
 shall we say of the general, powerful, and
 daily encouragement given to many of our
 poor ignorant fellow-creatures, to meet for
 the shocking purpose of exhibiting their
 dexterity in cruelly maiming or murder-
 ing each other, for the ungracious pastime
 of

of the unfeeling spectators : upon the hazard of whose barbarous prowess such sums are lost by many, as distress their families, lead to every species of dishonesty, to the repetition and extension of the crime, and often to suicide in the unsuccessful ; while the brutal victor is encouraged to a further course of evil perseverance. The laws of the land are evaded, or infringed ; and, what is worse, the positive command of God most boldly and ungratefully despised. But what aggravates the scandal at this time, is the public and presumptuous preparations made immediately upon so recent an impression of God's condescending notice of the general prayer to pass by our transgressions, and to try the sincerity of our professed contrition and repentance.

But let us proceed to a short detail of what exacts a very different conduct from the above.

Wasted, and disheartened as we were, not long time past, by a most fruitless contest, being beset on all sides by combined and powerful foes, it pleased the Almighty to check the ruinous current of disastrous circumstances, in the critical juncture of extremity ;

mity; to crown our arms with as signal as sudden victory, and even refresh us with the blessings of peace. But we soon forgot those perils, and the mercy that restrained them; lightly regarding the counsel of the Most High, and walking as usual in our own vain ways. Scarce were we settled in cheerful enjoyment of public tranquillity and success, when another storm arose, which seemed to threaten a speedy return of war, and miseries more terrible, as being more near us: but by Divine provision against an evil that otherwise must have met us in a most formidable shape, these terrors were dispelled through a skilful foresight; and even an accession of national honour obtained to our diminished and declining glory; but no adequate sense, or permanent return of pious improvement, is to be discovered in the body of the people. These escapes are ignorantly and proudly given to the wisdom of man *alone*, and the blessing upon *their* exertions serves only to lull us in dangerous security of having means in store to combat future evil; to puff us up, and blind us from a wise reliance on Him who alone is able to save; “ who maketh
“ peace

“ peace and war, and ordereth all things
 “ according to his will.”

Recently we have been alarmed with serious fear of the most melancholy calamity any country can experience, which might have opened the destructive sluices of public feud and fore dissension ; nor, from our deserts, could we have expected any speedy end of these unhappy differences, but for the hope of his faithful promise who will never forsake the offspring of the righteous :
 “ For God is a tower of salvation for the
 “ king, and sheweth mercy to his anoint-
 “ ed and to his seed for evermore.” And here again, the Lord of heaven and earth, whose gracious goodness knows no bounds, hath eminently interfered his healing power, and rescued us from the burthen of our apprehensions, affording further time for consideration and repentance.

But how is it with our hearts upon such extraordinary and reiterated acts of Divine indulgence ? Are they more disposed to turn towards the Lord, to offer the incumbent sacrifice of praise, and to apply in humble confidence to that source of virtuous aid, whence only the increase can be
 derived ?

derived? Can we honestly assert, and do we religiously profess, that these mighty favours proceed from the overflowings of merciful forbearance? Or, with a hard and unbelieving spirit, do we ascribe them to the mere consequence of ordinary means, without any connection in the vast designs of Providence? Now that our selfish apprehensions have subsided, and that we perceive no danger, are not our sentiments of piety too suddenly cooled, or does the fervour of our gratitude bear any just proportion to the importunity of our former supplications? Heaven forbid that any present, who entertain the least becoming sense of God's unwearied goodness, should give it so unworthy a reception, as these few questions I have submitted too plainly lead us to suspect may be the case of some; for in woful confirmation of the degrading effects of fallen nature, there certainly *are* such persons, who are dead to any sense of the transcendent blessing that furnishes the general transport upon this occasion: and where the powers of darkness have with malignant influence so deeply contaminated any human heart, as not to experience real pleasure

pleasure at this desirable event, what can be observed concerning such hapless beings? Under the first suggestions of honest resentment, which every upright and susceptible mind must feel at such depravity, they appear the objects of general reproach, and almost below contempt: but, when the purifying spirit of Christian charity interferes, it represents their state so seriously deplorable, it evinces such a distance from all generous sympathy, such a total deprivation of every principle that can dignify our nature, that to pity and pray for them becomes the more laudable resolution. How deep, how lamentable the corruption of a proud, perverse, ungrateful disposition, cannot be fuller shewn, than by such marks of unconcern, in every mind of so unhappy a complexion. Most justly may the observation of the prophet be applied; “the heart of man
“is desperately wicked above all things:
“who can know it?”

But to draw to a conclusion of the whole subject; let us leave all such to their own miserable reflections, which will occasionally supply severe remorse: the stings of galling conscience will furnish punishment
for

for wicked hope, in mortifying disappointment, and the view of general gladness.

Let us, who view the hand of Providence in all the works of nature, and are duly sensible of God's gracious concurrence in bringing about the happy change for which we are offering up our bounden thanks and praise—let us, under a thorough conviction of our manifold and heavy offences, and conscious of what we have strictly merited from the hands of God, confess, with grateful hearts, that the sword of vengeance has been poised and wielded round us, for awakening purpose, though graciously withheld from falling.

In short, in threatening for grievous crimes, the Lord selects the most severe, the most alarming punishments; the prospect of being deprived of a religious king is such in an extreme degree: on the other hand, in the display of his loving kindness, and astonishing forbearance, he showers upon his unworthy creatures the most exalted favours; the recovery of our beloved Sovereign is truly of this description: and in either case he usually works by ordinary means. But even his mercy should be awfully

awfully restraining upon the wicked; for in scripture language he may thereby be said "to heap coals of fire upon their head," and heighten their condemnation. This surely should put us upon our guard, from persevering in iniquity of any kind, lest a worse thing overtake us in the end, and no room is left us to escape. For the present, let us close our humble praises in this pleasing exultation, that our Sovereign is yet spared to say, "I know that I am this day king over Israel, and let us unite in prayer for the king's life and his son's." As for those who either cannot, or will not, see and own the manifest goodness of the Lord towards us, we must charitably pray in the Psalmist's words, "that the fools deal not so madly, and that the ungodly set not up their horn on high:" and while the Lord is on our side, we need not fear what injury man can do us; for he has solemnly promised, "the horns of the ungodly will I break, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted;" of which great truth the happy subject of our present sacrifice yields full assurance. And as for ourselves, my friends, as each of us is a member
of

of the body politic, and that the aggregate of our crimes provokes the Lord to national visitation; let every individual look to his *own* ways; “let us strive against the sin that doth most easily beset us;” let us cherish the means of grace held out for the bettering our corrupted nature. The Christian covenant is proposed to all who will close with the conditions: it is abundantly effectual, if not to make us perfect *here*, to fit us *for* perfection in another state of being. And let us not forget the threatenings of the Lord, that though his long suffering is designed to lead us to repentance, yet “that he will not spare in the terrible day of vengeance; for he is not slack as some men count slackness, but will execute sore and certain judgment upon the wicked; that he will fight against his enemies with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and fury, and great wrath.”

By diligence in our respective callings, obedience to government, and humble reliance upon God’s protection, we shall mutually contribute to form a grateful, holy, and prosperous community.

Finally, I will teach you, in very few
VOL. II. . U words,

words, ' that have no mixture of error or
 ' weakness in them,' " the good and the right
 " way ;' and, as they immediately precede the
 verse I have chosen for my text to this day's
 discourse, they may with great propriety con-
 clude it : " Only fear the Lord, and serve
 " him in truth, with all the heart ; for con-
 " sider how great things he hath done for us :
 " but if ye still do wickedly, ye shall be
 " consumed, both ye and your king." The
 difference however will be *material* in the
 two cases ; " that, as among many nations
 " there is no king like him," should it seem
 good in the eye of God to visit our incor-
 rigible backslidings with so severe a scourge
 as the deprivation of our present comforts,
 before the ordinary period that due course of
 nature and a fond and reasonable hope may
 promise ; HE will only shift his earthly
 crown for one above, glorious and eternal
 (a blessed exchange !) ; but WE, in conse-
 quence of disregarding the frequent admo-
 nitions of the Lord ; instead of witnessing
 for ever the recompence of those virtues of
 the Sovereign which now occasion the just
 sentiments of sorrow or joy, as his condi-
 tion has been affected by the *visitation* or
 the

the *mercies* of the Lord ; instead of being for ever familiar with those good spirits who are now preparing, though in different posts and states of trial, for victory, and enjoying the reward held out to all who press forward, and faint not ; instead of joining that glorious acclamation of innumerable happy beings, whose welcome chorus will form one voice of heavenly joy ; *We* shall hazard the condemnation of everlasting reproaches from an accusing conscience, “ because we would not know the day “ of our visitation : ” “ our portion will be “ with hypocrites and sinners,” in bonds of endless separation from all peace and comfort, where the bitter remorse and irreversible sensations of the ungodly and impenitent are so affectingly described “ by weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” May the Lord avert this dreadful sentence from being our fate, by blessing us with his grace, now in this *our* time of trial, that we may all finally meet in the kingdom of his righteousness, through the merits and assistance of his ever blessed Son, our Lord and Saviour. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, &c.

S E R M O N XII.

The heinous sin and great danger of harbouring an unrelenting spirit ;

O R,

Forgiveness of injuries an indispensable condition of God's favour.

Ut quos ratio non posset, eos ad officium religio duceret.
Cic.

MEMORANDUM

The Library has an



Forgetting of interest as insignificant con-
dition of Lord's library.

It does not non posse, nos ad officium religio ducere.
Cui.

S E R M O N XII.

MATT. chap. xviii. ver. 21, 22.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?—
Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven.

THERE is no precept in the whole gospel which requires more to be inculcated among men than that contained in these words of Jesus Christ. However we may gloss over our own failings, and fancy ourselves superior to others in point of generosity, liberality, and greatness of mind; however we may flatter ourselves that we are arrived at that necessary degree of Christian proficiency, to be in

charity with all men, yet most people deceive themselves in this estimate of their fancied excellence; for the sin of unforgiveness is that which doth most easily beset all ranks and descriptions of people: it is founded in pride and self-love, which is more or less interwoven in the common nature of all mankind; it is the bane of human life; few that ever lived but have found an enemy, or cherished some aversion themselves towards another; even the best disposed amongst us are not exempt from the effects of enmity: virtue and vice are ever at variance, and where an open wound is impracticable, a secret stab is often meditated. In proportion as we eradicate the seeds of this noxious quality, the present turbulent scene of things becomes more calm; the most vexatious and perplexing circumstances put on a brighter aspect; and even in this fiery trial for victory over sin, the world, and the devil, the mind is occasionally visited with such tranquillity and composure, as conveys some idea of that state of peace, and joy, and love, which is prepared hereafter for those who cultivate the spirit of forgiveness. The
beautiful

beautiful illustration of this heavenly virtue, which our blessed Lord has given in several parts of the evangelical history, are too well known to need a repetition. If we did but carefully study the spirit of his holy doctrines, and transfer to our own conduct the examples he produces in his plain and persuasive parables, there would be little need for the comments or exhortations of frail men, in order to recommend the practice of any moral virtue, or the beauty of religious truths. At the pure fountain we might imbibe the vital stream that would spring up as a well of life in our souls, and enable us to cleanse away those dregs of depravity, which, by hindering a cordial and Christian forgiveness of one another, will necessarily separate us from the love of God, and any valuable progress in Christian perfection; for unless we are sensible of having made some advances in subduing all degrees of malevolence, and have also planted in their room the virtues of brotherly love, mutual forbearance, and benignity of temper, we may rest assured we have gained no ground in the grand work appointed us on earth, where we are placed,

placed, in trial, to use the means afforded for our improvement, so that we may be prepared to be partakers of a better inheritance. In short, without charity, we are nothing worth : St. Paul upholds this truth most forcibly, reducing every other plausible pretention and ostentatious attainment to a mere bubble, and empty sound ; and, on the contrary, combining in one single word the essence of them all. He further exalteth the excellence of charity, by the most powerful and engaging charm, *that it covereth the multitude of sins* : in other words, wherever this grace hath happily taken root, its pervading virtue repels every hurtful property that would corrupt the mind ; in whatever breast this precious gift of Heaven is seen to flourish, it may be deemed a valuable assurance that exterior corruption, derived from mortal weakness only, shall never prevail against its influence ; and as human infirmity does certainly involve us in a multitude of sins, it is surely of great importance to cultivate a single temper, that will, if not *subdue* them all, at least prevent their gaining such ascendancy as to produce a fatal consequence. Now, where
a spark

a spark of unforgiveness is suffered to appear, we may be certain *that* soil is ill prepared to admit the purifying virtue so desirable, and so deservedly extolled: wherefore it may be profitable, in the noble attempt to extirpate so foul and dangerous an inhabitant, to try the gift and powers of reasoning with which the Deity hath graciously supplied us to light us on our way to happiness, in order to investigate the close connexion of this evil quality to our common nature, and by what means it has obtained such strong possession of some minds, and how it may be happily dislodged. And that I may do this more clearly, as well as profitably, both for your conviction and improvement, I shall adopt the good old mode of dividing my subject into distinct enquiries, and consequent deductions.

First, then, I shall take a full view of the obvious causes of this unhappy temper, and *distinguish* between them.

Secondly, I shall proceed to consider the influence it has upon ourselves, and society. And,

Lastly, I shall advert to the serious importance

portance of the *condition* attending the correction of it, or a contrary conduct; and *this*, as the most powerful dissuasive that can be proposed.

Now the latent principle which originally excites and feeds every malignant temper, is *pride*; this is the grand mover, the root of all the evil in our nature: but as to the more ostensible causes by which this principle operates upon the minds of men, so as to produce a noxious effect upon their conduct, they are almost as numerous as their complexions; they flow from the various designs, and constitutional habits, which govern our deportment under particular circumstances, and on the several occasions that the traffic of life produces for the exercise of our abilities, and trial of our virtue. Self-love, and self-interest, are at the bottom of most, if not all our views, where religion is not admitted as an arbitrator and controller of our projects. I believe it will be allowed, that what may *strictly* be termed the disinterested man, is a character rarely to be found: that it exists, it is for the credit of human nature to maintain; and they who happily find a
propensity

propensity to emulate it, approach the nearest it is possible in this life to *that* nature of which we are promised to be made partakers in the next, if we use the means to cultivate it in this scene of discipline.

Among the variety of articles that might be specified, as being productive of the evil in question, I shall confine myself at present to one object, to which the others are comparatively subordinate, and which I fear has more general sway over the human mind in this respect, than any exterior charms the world affords: I scarce need mention *money*. This is an ingredient so very essential to the gratification of all those passions and desires to which a disordered nature is subject, that it is no wonder its power is so predominant; it is attended at the same time with so dangerous an influence, that against nothing are we more cautioned in God's holy word than the covetous principle. The avaricious man is said to war against his own soul, and to be abhorred of God. Covetousness is ranked with idolatry, which we likewise read is declared to be most hateful to the Lord. All who devote themselves to this temper, are positively

tively excluded from the kingdom of God ; and we are exhorted, above all things, to beware of covetousness. Further, the promise of the wise man to such as guard themselves against the power of this evil, is, that *he shall prolong his days upon earth*. Now where this lust prevails in the disposition, it will naturally foment an opposition with whatever obstructs its favourite object, and lay the foundation of much strife ; from which, in course of time, and from innumerable exasperating circumstances, which ever attend upon similar causes, animosities are gradually engendered, and the spirit of unforgiveness gains force. It is with this vice as with every darling passion ; in proportion as it hath taken possession of the *heart*, the party enslaved will be for vindicating the measure to which he is stimulated by the ruling principle : thus the oppression of others is often defended by terming it, only supporting a fair right ; a claim perhaps existing from some accidental turn or subtle evasion of the common law, but as distant from strict justice, equity, and the pure law of nature, as weakness is the reverse of power, or choice compatible with necessity.

necessity. If this apology needs support, the blinded party will adduce the interests of a family; the precedent of thousands besides in similar situations; the opinion of the world; and even the duty of seizing every advantage that casual good fortune may present. On the other hand, the party who feels aggrieved, upholds resistance on the supposed justice of *his* cause; inveighs with ready eloquence against what appears so inimical to benevolence and disinterestedness; and thus, by mutual aggravation (the one through danger of his threatened loss, the other on being reproached for the promised gain), the seeds of discord fly thick on both sides, and take such violent root from warmth of opposition, as often to effect the most lamentable consequences.

Again, the rage for power, the treacherous pleas of temporary ambition, the captivating charms of preference and superiority over others, prove equally destructive of that peace and harmony which are the valuable ingredients of pure comfort and happiness in our passage through this life. And it is truly grievous to behold, even from
 4 what

what *trivial* causes, when fairly and abstractedly considered, the most inveterate feuds arise, so as to supersede every benefit from education, birth, or liberality of sentiment; nay, in some particular instances, to triumph over that darling spirit of liberty, so peculiar to this country, so congenial with the rights and privileges of a free community, even to the eventual prejudice of the cause and object the contention is intended to secure. What I immediately allude to in *this* place is the article of *rural sports*, which have been invariably found to tyrannize so strangely over the minds of *some*, that laws have been continually framing to ascertain the boundary of this fancied right, and, if possible, to curtail the mischief ensuing from the jealousies and disputes which this extraordinary passion has produced, even from men, in other respects, the most enlightened, liberal, generous, and tolerating, both from principle and natural disposition. Nay, life itself, and the most precious interests of families, have been sacrificed through stubborn contention about this frivolous concern: and, it is to be feared, that even the

the remedy, however well designed, will often tend to fan the fuel of resentment, without affording any protection to the object of dispute. It is really a matter of curious investigation, how this *single, temporary*, and (intrinsically) *unimportant* consideration, should obtain such general dominion over the mind, as to level, on many occasions, the gentleman, the scholar, and nobility, with the very lowest and most contemptible of mankind. But enough has been said upon it in *this* place, though doubtless it deserves notice in the catalogue of those contingencies which contribute to ruffle the tempers of men, and operate to molest that desirable unanimity of Christian brethren. Having instanced this among other causes productive of the resentful state of mind my text condemns, I will now submit a few further observations by way of *distinction*.

It may probably afford some matter of controversy, whether man, when his nature is closely canvassed, is properly a well-disposed, or a malignant being. The doctrine of the *fall*, which is so sadly proved by daily enormity, and universal disregard of

virtue, would lead us rapidly to the unfavourable side, did not our faith in a redeeming Power supply an inward conviction of renewal, by the arduous zeal of many after *good*: the genuine and almost innate benevolence of soul we find in some, and the precepts and examples held forth to us in the gospel, would never have been proposed by infinite Wisdom to beings wholly incapacitated to admit or follow them. As I am now addressing *Christians*, I take this for granted; in which case, though the weakness of our nature may be easily seduced by the power and artifice of the enemy, and though we may have fallen into temptations, as I have above described to beset most men in some degree or shape, let us wisely avail ourselves of what hath been mercifully done for us to prevent this mischief in our decayed constitution; let us follow the apostle's valuable advice, *Be angry, and sin not.*

If, in the heyday of life, or in heat of blood, or from various prejudices and natural infirmity; or bad advice, or darling passions, and too easy subjection to the pleas of self-interest or self-love; or through the forcible and blinding suggestions of pride, and

and a seductive consequence and superiority, we have been ever hurried away into the dangerous gulphs of continued and bitter strife, and by the goodness of divine Providence have escaped becoming victims to the violence of these assaults, but have been preserved to see their fatal tendency, and contemplate our happy liberation from their influence, to be sensible of the woful consequence of quitting this scene in habits of malicious grudging and unrelenting animosity ; let us agree in the wisdom and necessity of the foregoing admonition of St. Paul. The apostle, we may observe, well knowing the frailty of our composition, and the manifold provocations to which we are exposed in a state of perpetual warfare, does not attempt to establish a possibility of enduring the trial without disclosing occasional symptoms of natural depravity, without being sometimes sore and *angry*, and given to turbulent vexation and sudden wrath : but knowing likewise, that the indulgence of this temper will hazard both the temporal and eternal peace of men, he exhorts us to make a noble stand against their destructive effects. Be angry,

but *sin not* ; i. e. when the first ebullitions are over, when the primary causes of the acrimony are in great measure removed, either by accommodation, or intervention of time, or interposition of friends, or the humble proffers of reconciliation, beware of feeding the deadly crime of unforgiveness ; let your former transports subside in the candid review of mutual infirmity ; let no obstinacy of resentment attach *sin* to your conduct, but seize the earliest opportunity of returning to a Christian temper and deportment ; let no time be lost : “ let
 “ not the sun, *if possible*, go down upon
 “ your wrath ; but forbearing one another,
 “ and forgiving one another, if any man
 “ hath a quarrel against any man, even as
 “ Christ forgave you, so do ye.”

There is nothing should make persons hold out against conciliatory terms, where any misunderstanding hath subsisted, “ but
 “ for upbraiding, or pride, or disclosing secrets, or a treacherous wound :” *for these*, as the wise man says, *will every* friend depart ; but with the charitable and well-disposed, where reason re-assumes her seat, they will reflect, even in some of these, how far

far they may have provoked the offence, how probably they may have themselves been guilty of similar transgressions; whether the injury sustained has not been more imaginary than real; whether the malevolence of a busy world may not have magnified the report; and that, perhaps, the observation of the son of Sirach may be reciprocally applied with justice, and should operate to hasten peace: "There is
 "one that slippeth in his speech, but not
 "from his heart; and who is he that hath
 "not offended with his tongue?" But where, happily, *no* obstacles of this *severe* description do occur, and that the sources of discontent have ceased to flow; when all danger of a fresh breach is stopped, all galling differences settled, and each side probably guilty of equal error; whenever the tender-hearted hand of amity holds out the palm of anxious reconciliation, a too ready concurrence cannot be evinced; a rivalry in concern for what has passed should prove the certain symptoms of mutual sincerity, and generous oblivion confirm the bonds of future concord.

Charity inclines us then to hope, that

many may be found, who are at bottom so well disposed to brotherly affection, so ready to forgive, that any appearance of a different turn must be wholly imputed to unfavourable assaults that have been too powerful or sudden, and that a *weakness*, not *malignity* of nature, has for a season perverted their real sentiments : or, even with *such*, a generous struggle in the cause of *others* may have exacted a firm resistance, which, had they been at liberty to relinquish, with any share of equity or honour, they would have declined pursuing ; or, in their own case, have perhaps entirely refrained from. Now this favourable estimate of man leads aptly to the *discrimination* of character that concerns our present enquiry. Where a contrary disposition prevails, it is to be feared some dangerous poison lurks in the original composition of the party. All men, even those so unhappily constituted, are aware of the desirable claim to a different character, and therefore, though they do not *feel*, they would assume it. When pressed with the expediency of a different conduct, and where nothing justifiable can be advanced to vin-

dicare the hardness of their hearts, they will have recourse to sophistry. It is usual to take shelter under the trite assertion, that *they forgive, but cannot forget*—a declaration that in truth means *nothing* in the essential spirit of the temper we should cultivate to this good end. It may be serviceable therefore to the virtue recommended in the text, to investigate the real meaning of these words, and shew their ambiguity and poor effect.

Now, as it is not pretended to affirm, that the faculty of the memory can be *totally obliterated* at our pleasure, perhaps the excuse of *impossibility* to forget may be offered to defend a *degree* of distance and reserve towards those with whom we have been at variance; yet in a *religious* sense of forgetting (which is the only sense we have to do with *here*) there must be *such* an oblivion of every former wrong, as will prevent the renewal of any thing materially exceptionable. We are told by our blessed Lord, that bare profession is nothing worth, nor can any good effect take place, *if we forgive not from the heart*; which is as strong an expression as words can form, to prove

that the reconciliation must be *entirely* free from any latent particle of recollection that can affect its *purity*: though we cannot *destroy* the mental powers, we must *avoid*, as much as possible, every retrospect to past events; for whilst we dwell on *these*, we shall be apt to favour ourselves too much, which will render it difficult, if not impossible, to make much progress in the display of genuine kindness.

A strict attention to this restraint upon the mind, in order to render our forgiveness *perfect*, may likewise be deduced from the application of the very word we use to convey our meaning in this matter; OBLIVION being derived from the most copious and expressive language, in which, forgetfulness, and *absolute* forgiveness, have the *same* term for *both*: and that it is not impracticable for the human mind to arrive at this refinement, even independent of Christian obligation, we have the authority of heathen information; it being finely said by the Roman orator, to depict the junction of intellectual and moral excellence, and to enhance the dignity of the benevolent character, ‘ that nothing was ever known to
‘ escape

‘ escape the memory of his friend, but the
‘ WRONGS he had received.’

There is a maxim, however, that nearly relates to this part of our subject, and which contains more truth, and helps better to illustrate the *distinction* I am tracing, than the poor apology we have just examined; which is, ‘ that the person injured more
‘ readily forgives, than the party that intended injury :’ and, as I believe this is allowed incontestable by the accurate observers of those motives that actuate the human mind, it affords a fair conclusion, that where a free and open regret for past dissensions is discovered, and overtures of peace are successively rejected, the person amicably disposed is most likely to have been aggrieved than the aggressor. And the reason seems evident why it should be so; for, in the first place, the mind that shews a natural inclination to cherish benevolence, is not likely to have committed any essential injury; whereas the contrary may be suspected from a different temper and deportment : for he who hath wilfully done, or designed, a wrong, must be so conscious of his error, and of the hurtful

ful effect such an evil would have had upon *himself*, that he can hardly think it possible to *forgive*, being so deeply contaminated by the selfish principle: the weight he has upon his conscience will not admit a guest of so different a complexion; they cannot grow in the same soil; the quality of one must be meliorated to make room for the other. To overlook trespasses that have been excited by our own fault, implies a contradiction that cannot easily be reconciled on the principles that determine a consistent mode of acting; it is much the same as to confess oneself to have been wrong, which the pride of a malevolent spirit will never yield to.

On the other hand, where no desire of undue preference or other injurious motives have been predominant, an argument of innocence may fairly be deduced from an anxious zeal for reconciliation. In a case of this description, even the *sufferer* would be the happiest of the two; for when *his* mind is liberated from the rough assaults which obstruct the exercise of the nobler faculties, the better part of nature takes the lead. He laments most cordially the corroding

roding evils past; is sorry for the anxiety or pain he may have caused his adversary; places the trials and inconvenience he hath *himself* endured to the mutual infirmity and depravity of nature; and is earnest to seal his sincerity by forgiving others, as he wishes to be forgiven, and exemplifying it by every good office or kind attention his situation will admit.

In short, so comfortable in reality is the state of one party to himself, and so calculated is his conduct to obtain the praise of all good men, that, if a forgiving temper did not actually convey the highest and most warrantable self-complacency, it would be both political and prudent, from the several considerations specified, to strive for some claim to so heroic a competition. The *wisdom* of it, in a *worldly* sense, is founded on that principle which is allowed to preside over all temporal good, self-interest; and the *necessity* of it, in an article of much more important concern, is confirmed by the authority of holy writ: "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven;" in the sense both of command and invigorating condition.

I shall

I shall now proceed to the second thing proposed for our consideration—The baleful effect of an unrelenting spirit, both upon ourselves, and those with whom we are connected.

Now as a spirit of unforgiveness doth rather indicate a degree of guilt, when cool reflection interferes, it necessarily must create occasional disquietude: for unless a man is become quite callous to every generous feeling, and indifferent to the sentiments of mankind concerning him, he must be hurt at being thought possessed of the very foulest quality that can be painted; especially as the estimate will be made by those whose decision it most concerns us to deserve, the *peaccable* and *good*. But, as it happens with every disorder both of body and mind, if the progress is not checked in due season, it hourly becomes more difficult to cure, so doth the unforgiving temper attract additional malignity by time; fabricating fresh materials to support the error of our perverseness, and poisoning the mind till it is in a manner past reform. Thus the malady becomes doubly grievous in a *personal* sense, in that it is so peculiarly calculated

calculated to inflame every noxious property, to eradicate every kind one; and thus expose us to the just condemnation of every candid and generous observer.

Nor is its influence upon society less fatal. Our connections are too often induced to take part in our disputes: their partiality is excited, and their censures let loose, according to their attachment to the principals, and their biased judgments as to the merits of the cause. It is too obvious, that hereby fresh grounds of discord and disunion take place; coolness, and often contempt, ensue, where the most tender friendships had formerly flourished; and the mischief extends to numbers, through the dire influence of pride, or weakness, or a resentful spirit, in one. Nay, the curse of such unhappy feuds, and unchristian grudges, is often entailed upon posterity. In a religious point of view, this should be a momentous dissuasive against harbouring all bitter strife, lest it should be transmitted to the future detriment of those *most dear to us*: for the promise is, “that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even to the third and fourth generation:”
and

and as this is doubtless one of most enormous magnitude, by holding out against the admonitions of reason and scripture, we may unhappily instil the poison into them, which is so sweet for the present to our own vitiated disposition; or, by neglect to *prevent* any hurtful prejudices taking root (which will produce the same bad effect), we thereby train them up in our particular failings, and involve them in the punishment of trespasses, that will in time become their own, and which might have been avoided, by preparing them for the inheritance and culture of a different quality: for it is natural for them to indulge unfavourable prepossessions against those persons whom, from their earliest years, they have been accustomed to hear depreciated and condemned.

If we duly reflected upon the abundant store of trouble that may possibly attend our innocent progeny in their passage through this vale of misery and vicissitude, and upon the conflict they will necessarily have with their own passions, and the rubs they may meet with from others in the promiscuous scenes of life; surely it will
afford

afford them sad trial enough, without cruelly subjecting them to additional matter of sorrow, by bequeathing them a fancied share in our unsettled differences and rancorous dislikes. This seems the worst appendage, in a temporal light, to the pernicious temper I am willing to expose, and correct by every possible argument. Its evil tendency in our own persons, and infectious consequence to the community we belong to, might be still further illustrated by many other instances; but as it is a quality, that, when grown inveterate, does not easily yield to human persuasion, it would be waste of time to produce any but the most evident and affecting proofs of its malignant nature and influence: I shall therefore hasten to the last and most weighty motive that can be urged, to guard us against encouraging the growth of such a dangerous and treacherous disorder, which is,

3. The serious importance of the *condition* of our correcting this sinful habit, or continuing to possess it.

In treating what concerns this most essential part of the subject, I shall be induced to expatiate upon the condition in two different

different points of view ; and having been already rather diffuse, I will contrive to be as concise and close as possible in my method. It is to be hoped, that in some cases, where reason has not sufficient power to urge men to their duty, the arguments with which * *religion* abounds may be employed with more success. Men are not always aware of the fatal tendency of certain tempers, to decide their final happiness or misery ; neither are they properly awake to this most serious truth, that every transaction of their lives will be weighed in the balance of unerring judgment ; that, in the estimate which will pronounce their fitness for reward or punishment, nothing will be considered but upon religious principle ; that, by a creature framed for discipline and probation, in order to figure in a better state, nothing should be performed abstracted from this rule. They erroneously suppose, that reason and religion are unconnected ; that some things may be qualified by their own partial judgment, of which religion will take no cognizance ; that the latter imposes often too hard a task, and that the other,

* Ut quos ratio non posset, eos ad officium religio duceret. Cic.

other, as an independent guide, may be seduced to side with their partial inclinations. And why do they frame this fond hypothesis? Because religion would immediately detect the cheat they put upon themselves. All this is no less dangerous than false. Reason is given to lead us to revelation: it is not religion itself, but a light to shew us the purity and necessity of it. When, therefore, men have courage to bring their actions and dispositions to the strict test of religious scrutiny, they soon perceive the veil their own self-love has cast over reason; which *alone* will rarely effect the change that may be required. In this case then we must appeal to *religion*, as the court of chancery to the mind, and consider the other (when void of this superior influence) as the common law, liable to a thousand quirks and quibbles, when wrested according to the genius, the ingenuity, or misapplication of its directors. Therefore, as the virtue recommended in the text is perhaps among the hardest tasks in nature to attain to perfectly, in the true spirit of evangelical injunction, and consequently proportionably expedient, as replete with

danger, we must have recourse to the *condition* as a remedy.

The precept is very explicit and complete; it implies the fullest remission of every trespass, however aggravating or repeated. "I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven." There is no plea left for exception or evasion, and that there should not is most natural and right; for if we advert to the spirit of these words, "*Forgive us, AS we forgive our debtor,*" the petition and sentence *both* proceed from our own measure of judgment: we cannot, without self-condemnation, but do in this case as we would be done by; and if we only suffer a moment's humble recollection to take place, how will the mercy of God preponderate towards *ourselves*, in comparison of the utmost lenity we can shew our brethren? What proportion, I say, can the greatest provocation or indignity we can receive from one another bear to the numerous offences and ingratitude we are continually committing against our heavenly Father? At the very *best* we are unprofitable servants; and, from the first exercise of our reason
and

and passions, we have all perverted them both, and become desperately unworthy. If we are blest with riches, power, or health, how improperly do we employ generally these talents, how foreign from the good intent with which they were bestowed ! Instead of gratefully converting them to his glory or praise, are they not often consumed and prostituted to his dishonour and our disgrace ? How little do we consider the majesty of the supreme Director in any case ! and though indebted to him for our very being, and, from our cradle to our grave, for every protection and comfort we enjoy, how do we trample on his laws, despise his admonitions, and provoke his wrath ! Our transgressions are of such magnitude and evil quality as to merit eternal punishment ; they are committed against a Being so pure, so good, and so long suffering, that it aggravates their enormity ; and yet we are averse from overlooking the trespasses of a fellow-creature, prone to error like ourselves, perhaps from bare mistake of judgment, or by too ready yielding to the same passions we have not been able to subdue. In this we assimilate ourselves to the cruel and wicked servant in

the chapter whence the text is taken : nay worse, we resemble the infernal spirits themselves, whose rebellion following their pride and selfish will, prevents their relenting, though they feel their guilt. Shame on such foul hypocrisy and ingratitude ! If we were now arraigned before the awful seat of rigid justice, and, stripped of all our vain pretensions and specious arts to screen our present perverseness, we were to receive no more mercy than what we often shew, we could have no manner of reason to complain : we are forgiven AS we forgive. But our most merciful and heavenly Father, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the truth and be saved*, holds out this double consideration—*Choose life, or death*. If ye forgive men *their* trespasses, your Father will forgive *you* : therefore choose life. If ye forgive *not*, neither will your Father forgive *you*. Tremble at the alternative ! What ! have the endless scenes of bliss no charms ? Is the soul so contaminated by its earthly frame, that it feels no wish to *soar*, to taste a purer light, to revel in the society of blessed spirits, to explore the astonishing works of the celestial

celestial world, and traverse with security and ease those regions of wonder and delight ; to experience the joys of an uncorrupted state ; to learn the mysteries and mercies of God's providence, and trace the marvellous links which now perplex our judgment and elude our search ; and to contemplate the wisdom of the grand design ? Feel we no desire to join the heavenly choir in endless praises of the dread Lord of all these joys ; and once more meet the improved forms of those we venerated here, and humbly trust they now participate this happiness ? Or has the grave and second death no terrors ? Can a rational being endure the thought of endless misery, and not use the rational means to avert the sentence ? Shall the idea of falling into nought raise horror ; and shall the solemn oath and sentence of the Omnipotent have no effect ? Can riches, honours, power, learning or understanding, aught avail in the hour of death or at the day of judgment, without an interest in real virtue, and dependence upon God through Jesus Christ ? What would it profit a man to gain the whole world at present, and lose his soul at last ?

last ? or what can be given in exchange for that immortal part of us ? Let these important considerations penetrate our hearts. The irretrievable event hangs upon this single clause, *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven*. Can any be so mad as to demur ? The condition is pressed upon us from unbounded love, and so clear and reasonable, that out of our own mouth we shall be condemned, and God be justified in judgment.

Our deadly foe, knowing the powerful effect of charity on the mind, to purify our nature and to attract our Maker's favour, is ever busy to suggest expedients to defeat our happiness. Sometimes he prolongs our return to duty through the medium of our pride, insinuating that to pass by an injury indicates a poverty of spirit beneath the dignity of man : whereas the contrary is the truth ; and nothing can be more heroic than to subdue oneself, or more angelic than to forgive. To the *poor in spirit*, in this angelic sense, belongs by promise even *the kingdom of heaven*. At other times men satisfy themselves in *this*, as for their general faults, that they will repent *at last*.

We know, by daily experience, that when
men

men approach their last home, they are generally willing to declare that they are in charity with the world, that they wish all men well, and are ready to forgive their enemies. Having no longer any part in the transactions of this life, and knowing it is not in the power of any mortal to cause them further trouble or vexation, it is an easy matter to make a verbal confession to this effect, especially when the *condition recurs*. In like manner the most profligate sinner, when his carnal passions no longer afford a trial of virtue, his appetites are languid as his body, and death and his troubled conscience stare him in the face, is eager enough to express his sorrow for what is past, and to promise a resolution of reformation were it possible to recover : but unless God touches the heart by a miracle, we have no good ground to think that the man who has fostered a malicious and revengeful state of mind for years ; who has so long stood out against the united force of reason and the calls of duty, or all his life persisted in most flagitious courses—that either should at *once* admit a sanctifying spirit of perfect charity, or obtain such purity of heart,

heart, as would be able to resist temptation if renewed, and produce works meet for repentance. God only knows the *heart* whether it be sincere, and how far conviction might effect conversion; but it cannot be generally admitted as a safe experiment; nor, in the nature of things, is it likely it should be so. Thus men fall into the last and most dangerous snare of the devil, and cheat themselves of all that is valuable: while health, and strength, and reason would assist, they obstinately oppose their own happiness, and grasp at the *condition*, when they can no longer assure their own purpose.

Gracious Heaven! can nothing soften the obduracy of the human heart in the *accepted* time? Let us for a moment contemplate the awful period of our separation from this world. How affecting is the idea of *eternity*, that unknown region whence no traveller returns! How necessary to prepare a scene of unmixed purity and bliss! How indispensable *some* qualification for a seat among the righteous! and how vain to expect admittance to the heavenly banquet without the wedding garment! What terror accompanies the approaching prospect!

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What agonizing despondency besets the bewildered soul, on fancying itself the object of wrath and justice, instead of *mercy*! And how is it possible we can escape, if we persist in adding actual guilt to natural depravity; if we pollute and *steel* the mind almost beyond a possibility of recovery; if we continue in unforgiveness and stubborn disinclination towards Christian unity, and an oblivion of past grievances? But supposing the second death should not succeed our immediate separation from the body, which is the sterile hope of *some*, and that insensibility for ages should retard perception and final judgment, what would be gained by such a fact? As the tree falls, so will it lie: what sets close to the heart at night, will pay its *first* visit to the memory in the morning. In that sleep of death, there will be no opportunity for *reformation*. If we depart in rancour, without having fulfilled the task enjoined in the text, we shall hardly awake possessed of purifying charity, and brotherly love. He only is blessed who dieth in the Lord; and he who dieth in the interests of his bitterest enemy, enslaved to his most deadly

snare, can only expect to reap the fruits of the corruption he hath cultivated.

When the voice of the archangel shall sound the moment of our *change*, and the bright refulgence of celestial glory reveal the majesty of the immaculate Judge, how shall we look on him whom we have *pierced*? What plea shall the relentless make to *Him*, who forgave his cruellest enemies, who *prayed* for them, who *died* to save his *murderers*? Can the merciless expect to *obtain mercy*; or the foe to peace-making rank *with the children of God*? No: divine revelation hath decided it. “He that is
 “unjust, let him be unjust still; and he
 “that is filthy, let him be filthy still:
 “he that is righteous, let him be right-
 “teous still; and he that is holy, let him
 “be holy still. And behold, I come
 “quickly, and my reward is with me,
 “to give to every one according as his
 “work shall be.”

The seal is put upon men's characters at the hour of their departure from this scene of trial. The word of God pronounceth positively on the case, leaving no hope even for the *delay* of punishment; for we

are there assured, that when the souls of men are separated from their bodies, they are conveyed *immediately* to a state of happiness, where they *rest in hope*; or to a region of remorse and woe, fitting their evil deeds, and *preparatory* to their final doom. O may these solemn reflections rouse us to escape the threatening danger! Let us work while it is day to redeem the time, and undo, by future meekness and humility of spirit, the impurity we may have contracted, by yielding too long to the opposite temper. Let us make haste to agree with our adversary whilst we are in the way with him, and atone by Christian vigilance for that hardness of heart, that will render us fit companions for none but evil spirits. Whilst a fellow sinner like ourselves would fain be reconciled, and craves remission for the venial trespasses he may have committed, let us cheerfully embrace the blessed opportunity of being tender-hearted, lest the dread sentence be irrevocably registered against us of cruel and wicked servants; and *He*, whom we have so foully offended during the whole course of our lives, and is yet so gracious as to propose the most natural

tural terms of pardon—lest *He*, to whom we can pay nothing equivalent to the debt we owe him (though we give all we have), in his just wrath at our provoking inhumanity, should deliver us to the tormentors, and inflict the punishment due to our complicated transgressions. Let us take heed in time : for verily, saith Christ, thus shall my heavenly Father do to you, if ye from your *hearts* forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Now, &c.

28 SEGO

F I N I S.